



Plantations in Rural Landscapes

(IFA Forestry Policy Statement No. 2.3)

The issue

The development and expansion of plantations requires that sufficient areas of cleared land are available to be planted. Remnant native vegetation may impact negatively on the establishment, growth and management of plantations. However, clearing of substantially intact areas of native vegetation for plantations can threaten regional conservation objectives.

Background

The National Principles on Forest Practices Related to Wood Production in Plantations, agreed between the Commonwealth and the States, says "Native forests should not be cleared for plantation establishment where this would compromise regional conservation and catchment management objectives."

Large areas of substantially cleared land are required for the expansion of the plantation resource in Australia to meet the goals contained in the policy statement "Plantations for Australia: The 2020 Vision". In the past, many of Australia's plantations were established by clearing native forest. In recent years, most plantations have been established on marginal agricultural land that has already been cleared of forest.

Most agricultural land suitable for plantation forestry also includes areas of remnant native vegetation, varying in size from single trees to substantial areas. These areas of remnant native vegetation and their impacts must be considered in new plantation developments. Remnant trees may impede plantation establishment and growth, but in some circumstances may have important conservation values, such as nesting sites for birds and mammals. Larger patches of remnant vegetation have greater conservation benefit, and can generally be accommodated in large plantation areas. In some circumstances, the maintenance of native vegetation within plantations can have benefits for stand productivity and the maintenance of key ecosystem processes.

Most States and Territories now have legislation that aims to protect significant native vegetation from clearing. However, this legislation can be complex to implement at the local scale, and may act as an impediment to the development of plantations on agricultural land. The challenge for plantation developers is to achieve the appropriate balance on a landscape scale of native vegetation retention and clearing for plantation establishment.

Policy

The Institute of Foresters of Australia (IFA) advocates the continued development of plantations in rural landscapes to meet the 2020 Vision target provided this development balances environmental, social and economic benefits.

The IFA supports and encourages:

- expansion of plantations on cleared farmland where long-term economic, employment and environmental benefits outweigh the social and environmental impacts.
- application of industry Codes of Practice and Environmental Management Systems in plantation development
- open industry communication leading to increased community understanding of potential impacts and benefits of plantations development.
- ongoing research and development into appropriate species and management practices that will enhance the development of plantations.

The IFA considers that:

- the benefits of plantation development in rural landscapes can be maximised and the impacts minimised by:
 - development of opportunities for downstream processing
 - support by the forest industries of local businesses and communities
 - equitable contribution by the industry to fire prevention and suppression
 - infrastructure planning on a regional rather than industry basis and appropriate
 - plantation industry contribution to road maintenance
 - integration of forestry plantations into farming enterprises where appropriate.

Further Information

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