



Clearing of Native Forests for Plantations

(Forestry Policy Statement No. 2.4)

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 that plantation development should take place in a way that balances environmental, social and economic objectives and, where possible, plantations should be established on cleared agricultural land with minimal clearing of remnant native vegetation.

The IFA supports and encourages:

- Protection of regionally significant areas of native vegetation;
- Scientifically based identification and assessment of the conservation value of remnant native vegetation;
- Conservation of appropriate areas of native vegetation within plantation developments, including riparian zones, steep slopes and conservation corridors;
- Adherence to appropriate legislative processes governing the clearance of native vegetation.

The IFA recognises:

- Clearance of small areas of remnant vegetation that have been identified to have little or no conservation significance, that are well represented regionally, or that are diseased or degraded, may take place within plantation developments;
- Small scale ‘trading off’ of cleared and uncleared areas at the local scale, including revegetation with native species, may take place to create efficient and/or consolidated plantation areas or to complement conservation goals.

Further Information

Burns, K., Walker, D. and Hansard, A. (1999) Forest plantations on cleared agricultural land in Australia: A regional economic analysis. ABARE Research Report 99.11

Commonwealth of Australia (1992) National Forest Policy Statement

Commonwealth of Australia (2002) Plantations for Australia: The 2020 Vision – 2002 Revision

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Lindenmayer, D.B., Hobbs, R.J. and Salt, D. (2003) Plantation forests and biodiversity conservation.
Australian Forestry 66(1) 62-66

Standards Australia (2003) The Australian Forestry Standard AS 4708 (Int) and AS 4708 Supplement 2 (Int) – Guidance for medium and large plantation ownerships.

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