

Maintaining Forest Health

IFA Forestry Policy Statement 1.5

Increased public and private sector funding is needed to improve the development and sustainability of forest values. The Institute of Foresters of Australia (IFA) advocates a national commitment to forest health that assesses long-term threats through research, education and training.

The Issue

There are many threats to forest health that affect commercial and environmental values (including biodiversity). These threats include biological factors such as weeds, animals, insects, fungi and viruses; and physical factors such as drought, flooding and fire. While forests are adapted to tolerate some level of these threats, excessive levels or incidences of these can cause long term damage and disease. Plantations are particularly susceptible to disease, especially caused by exotic pathogens and pests (to which many plantations may have a low tolerance). Anthropogenic climate change may also exacerbate these threats.

Background

Assessing the existing and potential threats to forest health is important due to the increased use of plantations for wood production. Because of this there is a need for regular forest health surveillance. Plantations produce around two-thirds of timber products used by Australians. As plantations generally contain a narrow range of species and genotypes, they are more susceptible to damaging disease and pests than native forests.

The cinnamon fungus (*Phytophthora cinnamomi*) is an example of an introduced pathogen that caused widespread damage to eucalypt forests in temperate regions of Australia after being first identified in the 1960s. Extensive research resulted in management strategies (including monitoring) that are now controlling spread and limiting damage in affected areas.

Since agricultural and urban settlement in Australia, changes to fire regimes have been necessary to protect people, homes and crops. Australia's forests are adapted to certain fire regimes, so inappropriate fire frequency may change the distribution and density of some species and lead to an overall decline in forest health and resilience.

Monitoring forest health is a typical strategy used for sustainable timber production. This involves the inspection of planted and natural forests by trained observers to assist early detection of developing pests and disease problems. Forest industry biosecurity planning is also used to reduce the risk of exotic organisms to plantations; this is achieved through exclusion, containment, eradication and control.

Policy

The IFA supports and encourages:

- The continuation of forest health management in Australia through the guidelines of the *National Plantation Timber Industry Biosecurity Plan* (2007)
- Regular forest health surveys
- Appropriate silvicultural practice and prescribed burning programs to maintain forest health.

The IFA considers that:

- All forest managers should apply systems of surveillance and develop strategies to control and prevent threats to forest health
- Increased public and private sector funding is needed to improve the development and sustainability of forest values through research, education and training.