

Clearing of Native Forests for Plantations

IFA Forestry Policy Statement 2.4

The Institute of Foresters of Australia (IFA) advocates that plantations should be developed through balanced environmental, social and economic objectives. Where possible, plantations should be established on cleared agricultural land with minimal clearing of remnant native forest.

The Issue

Plantation development and expansion requires sufficient areas of cleared land. Remnant native vegetation can have a negative impact on the establishment, growth and management of plantations. However, clearing mostly intact areas of native vegetation for plantations can threaten regional conservation objectives.

Background

In the past, many of Australia's plantations were established by clearing native forest. More recently, most plantations have been developed on marginal and cleared agricultural land.

Most agricultural land suitable for plantation forestry also includes areas of remnant native vegetation that varies in size from individual trees to substantial areas. These areas and their impacts must be considered in new plantation developments. These trees may impede plantation establishment and growth, but in some circumstances may have important conservation values (such as habitat for birds and mammals). Larger areas of native vegetation have greater conservation benefit and can generally be accommodated in large plantation areas. In some instances, maintaining native vegetation within plantations can benefit stand productivity and important ecosystem processes.

Most States and Territories have legislation to protect significant native vegetation from clearing. However, this legislation can be difficult to implement at a local scale, and can restrict the development of plantations on agricultural land. Plantation developers need to work to achieve a balance between conserving native vegetation and clearing to establish plantations.

Policy

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
- Appropriate legislation governing the clearance of native vegetation.

The IFA considers that:

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