

The Role of Forestry as a Primary Industry

IFA Forestry Policy Statement 4.1

The Institute of Foresters of Australia (IFA) advocates that forestry is a vitally important land use across Australia and that government policies and land use decisions should foster competitive and sustainable forest industries. Forestry has an important role as a primary industry in Australia, contributing multiple economic, social and environmental benefits. Expanding production forests and developing value-adding wood processing industries will enhance the benefits of sustainable forest management and the use of forest and non-forest products by industry and the community.

The Issue

Commercial forestry provides many commercial and environmental products and services that complement those provided by agriculture. The regulation of native forest management has caused a shift to plantation forestry and tree farming in many agricultural communities across Australia. In some cases planted forests compete with other primary industries for access to cleared agricultural land, leading to tensions between foresters and farmers. Better understanding is needed to realise the many mutual benefits from integrating forestry into rural landscapes and management systems.

Background

Land use is determined by economic, social, environmental and political values. Often economic values are driving incentives for prioritising urban and infrastructure development over forest production, or using private agricultural land for plantations. Many benefits flow from commercial forestry operations including:

- Active management, protection and conservation of forest biodiversity
- Provision of renewable, low embodied energy forest products (such as timber) that can substitute for carbon-intensive, non-renewable resources for construction, furniture and energy supply
- Employment and economic development and diversity in rural areas and regional centres
- Amelioration of dryland salinity, recharge of ground water, enhancement of surface water quality, soil conservation and landscape diversity
- Improved agricultural management by providing stock shelter and fodder
- Reduced dependence on imported forest products (particularly those from uncertain sources).

Policy

The IFA supports and encourages:

- Plantations for Australia: the 2020 Vision as a conceptual plan to expand the area of plantation forests in Australia and the opportunities to integrate commercial forestry with traditional agriculture to create more sustainable rural landscapes
- Land use decisions appropriately taking into account economic, social and environmental values
- Companies engaged in plantation establishment or development of new forest industries to engage the community to promote acceptance and awareness of the benefits of sustainable forest industries
- The adoption of forest certification systems including the Australian Forestry Standard and the Forest Stewardship Council schemes to verify that forest products have been sustainably sourced.

The IFA recognises that:

- Sustainably managed forests and plantations can be harvested to provide forest products with multiple benefits and advantages as raw materials to meet a range of society's needs
- Forest industries support vibrant rural communities (such as through local timber processing)
- Plantation forestry, which now accounts for two-thirds of Australian wood production, offers great potential for economic growth and social and community sustainability in many rural communities.