

Conservation and Management of Rainforests

IFA Forestry Policy Statement 1.1

The Institute of Foresters of Australia (IFA) recognises that rainforests have a wide range of important biological, cultural and economic values. It advocates to protect and sustainably manage these ecosystems for current and future generations.

The Issue

In Australia, rainforests are recognised for their aesthetic, commercial, scientific and philosophical values. Maintaining these values can be challenging and create conflict between land managers and stakeholders. These pressures on rainforests, brought on by different values, are an ongoing concern for the management and conservation of rainforests.

Background

Rainforests are found across Australia, yet only cover about 4.2 million ha or 0.5%. Within this area they contain 60% of all Australian plant families and about one third of all mammal and bird species.

Pressures for the destruction of rainforest (including that on private land) has been driven by the need of land for development (residential and infrastructural); the production of land for agricultural or horticultural purposes; destructive agents such as disease, pest and fire; and natural disturbances.

Behind the pressures for preservation is the recognition of the many values in rainforests. This includes the diversity of species; the specialty foods and medicines found only in these areas; the role rainforests play in science and conservation; their impact on the natural environment (including water quality and quantity); their economic value to forestry and tourism; and their cultural and social significance to the national heritage.

Policy

The IFA supports and encourages the:

- Conservation of rainforests in protected or sustainably managed areas
- Management of protected rainforests through the inventory of biological resources, the clear definition of strategies and by monitoring developments and changes
- Natural regeneration of rainforest to increase rainforest habitat and the afforestation of cleared lands that homed rainforest species
- Ongoing research to identify needs for rainforest management, the cultivation of high value timber species in plantations and achieving a balance between sustainable forestry production and preservation.

The IFA considers that:

- Management of rainforests should be guided by the principles of ecological sustainability and clear management goals
- Indigenous association with rainforests should be acknowledged in management strategies
- Governments should advise and assist private landowners in management and protection
- Rainforest timber can be used if guided by scientific principles and a Code of Practice
- Silvicultural treatment offers options for sustaining plant and animal species
- Landowners should be granted a right to harvest if they are conducting reforestation with rainforest species
- Rainforests degraded by past activities (such as pests, disease or fire) should be rehabilitated
- Mixed forests that contain elements of rainforest and other vegetation types should be considered separately to rainforests when considering land use and management strategies.