

Future Directions for Australia's National Forest Policy

IFA Forestry Policy Statement 2.10

The Institute of Foresters of Australia (IFA) advocates a contemporary, holistic National Forest Policy Statement (NFPS) to provide strategic directions for the management of Australia's forests and for the Australian forestry industry. It is time to revise the National Forest Policy Statement, which has served well for two decades, to address a range of emerging issues impacting on society's expectations of forest management.

The Issue

Australia's NFPS provided basis for the development of the Regional Forest Agreements, the Plantations 2020 initiative and the implementation and reporting of sustainable forest management. More recently, a host of issues have gained increasing prominence in community and policy debate; this includes the management of old growth and conservation forests, plantation expansion, climate change, and forest management for environmental services, such as carbon sequestration and water. Revising the NFPS would include these issues and provide the basis for future forest management in Australia.

Background

The NFPS was developed in 1992 after a long period of public and intergovernmental debate on the management of Australian forests. It outlines broad national goals for sustainable forest management. However, it focuses on the issues of the 1990s and needs revision to address contemporary forestry issues.

Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) were a key element of the NFPS. They are twenty-year plans for the conservation and sustainable management of Australia's native forests. The RFA process significantly affected forest management: it increased the area of forests and woodlands in the reserve system and the level of protection for forest values. However, RFA application has been limited and it would be more beneficial to apply their principles across Australia's forests.

In 1997, the Plantations for Australia: the 2020 Vision was launched to enhance regional wealth creation and international competitiveness through a sustainable increase in Australia's plantation resources. It set a notional target of trebling the area of commercial tree crops by 2020. This strategy has resulted in a doubling of Australia's plantation estate over the past decade.

Policy

The IFA supports and encourages:

- Active management to sustain the values associated with native forests of all tenures
- Extending the principles of the Regional Forest Agreements to other forests, and through ongoing review and renewal at the end of their twenty-year life
- Enhancing the role of all forests to deliver ecosystem services
- Strengthening the implementation of the National Indigenous Forestry Strategy
- Developing enhanced regulatory and reporting systems to support sustainable forest management
- Supporting the role of plantations to deliver multiple benefits
- Developing the role of plantations to deliver climate change mitigation responses
- Building and sustaining the capacity for sustainable forest management, and innovation in the forests and forest products sector.