

Community Awareness and Knowledge on Forestry

IFA Forestry Policy Statement 5.4

The Institute of Foresters of Australia (IFA) advocates for improved government and industry initiatives to promote and make available factual information on the social, economic and environmental outcomes of forest management practices on State and private land.

Current, accurate and accessible information on forestry is vital to encourage community understanding and support for forest management practices.

The Issue

Due to public debate on forest land use and management practices, there has been an increase in community awareness and interest in forestry in recent years. However, community awareness and knowledge of forestry is often hampered by a lack of accurate information. Community views are often influenced by the negative portrayal of short-term impacts of disturbances (such as timber harvesting) without a full understanding of the dynamic nature of forests or the importance of the forest industries.

Background

Forests have multiple uses and accordingly there are many differing views on how these forest values are managed.

Forest managers have not generally responded to criticism of forestry practices as their employment conditions prevent this. Often the public has had to source factual information on their own initiative. This has allowed for misleading or incorrect information, or incorrect interpretations of information.

Community awareness initiatives need to show the long-term nature of forestry and the importance of the forest industries to supply the nation's demand for forest products. Short-term impacts, such as timber harvesting, should be considered within the broader context of sustaining forest values.

Policy

The IFA supports and encourages:

- Raising community awareness of all forest values and of the role and impact of scientifically based forest management
- Professional foresters engaging with community and environmental organisations, as well as the media, to improve public understanding of sustainable forest management
- Education initiatives for teachers and students that aim to improve understanding and knowledge of forest management and environmental protection
- Developing and maintaining demonstration forests and interpretative forest drives to allow the public to view and understand active forest management
- Ongoing research, monitoring and evaluation to strengthen the knowledge of sustainable forestry.

The IFA will:

- Work with governments, interest groups and communities to increase knowledge of forestry
- Provide independent, professional advice and information about forestry and its impacts
- Encourage the forestry sector to promote positive messages about forest science and forestry
- Promote understanding of forest management as a science profession that includes a wide range of fields, including timber production, water catchment management and recreation management
- Engage with environment and community organisations through designated media liaison officers in each State Division.