



Forestry Australia Conference Adelaide 20-24 Oct 2025

Rob de Fégely AM,

Why is Forestry in Australia so difficult?

Introduction - Why Study Forestry

In 1975 I started a long journey in forestry

- Farming and Agriculture were terrible
- But I like growing things
- Working outdoors
- I loved forests, wood & conservation
- People generally loved foresters and forestry.



Fast Forward 50 years and where are we?

Australia is the 6th most forested country in the World (FAO, 2020) but we are not self sufficient and have a worsening trade deficit – so how can we fix this?

Problems

1. Binary conversation – native forests bad, plantations good
2. Harvesting in our natural forests has fallen by over 70% in last 20yrs
3. Private landowners & farmers not engaged
4. Our planted estate is not expanding
5. Massive and growing trade deficit
6. Struggling with narrative

So... Why Is Growing And Harvesting Wood So Bloody Hard!!!

1. Over reliance on Government
2. Not engaged the private sector
3. Communication is poor

We changed our landscape

Bifurcated the land - open woodland became dense forest and farms cleared of forest!



Painting Martha Berkeley – Mount Lofty from the Terrace c 1840 – ex Gammage 2011

Prior to 1960 people not concerned about forestry

The dual impact of clearfell harvesting for woodchips and clearing for softwood plantations created division.



Source: R&V Routley – The Fight for the Forests, 1975

We are still testing our communities!!!

When will we learn??

.....And now we want plant trees purely for Carbon!!!!



So what is the solution



1. Change our binary conversation.

It is not important how a forest is established but how it is managed.

Is managing regrowth a better investment than new plantations?

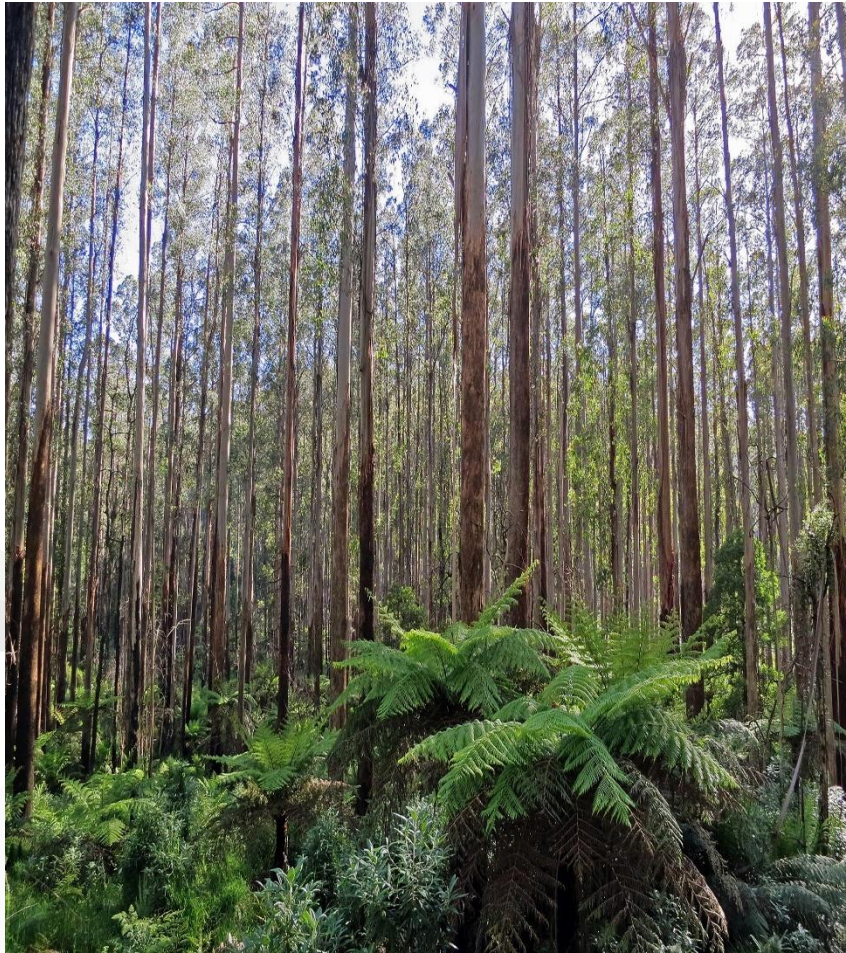


Photo – M Ryan



Photo – R de Fegely

2. Engage the Private sector - farmers

Farmers own over 30% of Australia's natural forests and they have the land and skills to contribute to wood production.

- Stop trying to access farmland and start thinking about how we develop a value proposition for farmers to grow plantations and manage their forest.
- Show farmers the investment potential
- Governments can facilitate but they are not the solution.
- Imagine if all our farms were run by the Government!

3. Transparent Market Reporting – Beef Cattle example

Bega Associated livestock agents hold a store cattle sale on the last Thurs of the month.

Known prices and quality. Scale is not a problem – open to all farmers



3. Competition Laws – Cartel Provisions under CCA*

A cartel provision involves some form of agreement or understanding being reached between two or more persons/entities who are competitors

Four types of conduct:

1. Price Fixing
2. Market Sharing
3. Bid Rigging
4. Output restrictions

CCA = Competition and Consumer Act, 2010 (Commonwealth of Australia)

3. Competition Laws – Competitive Neutrality

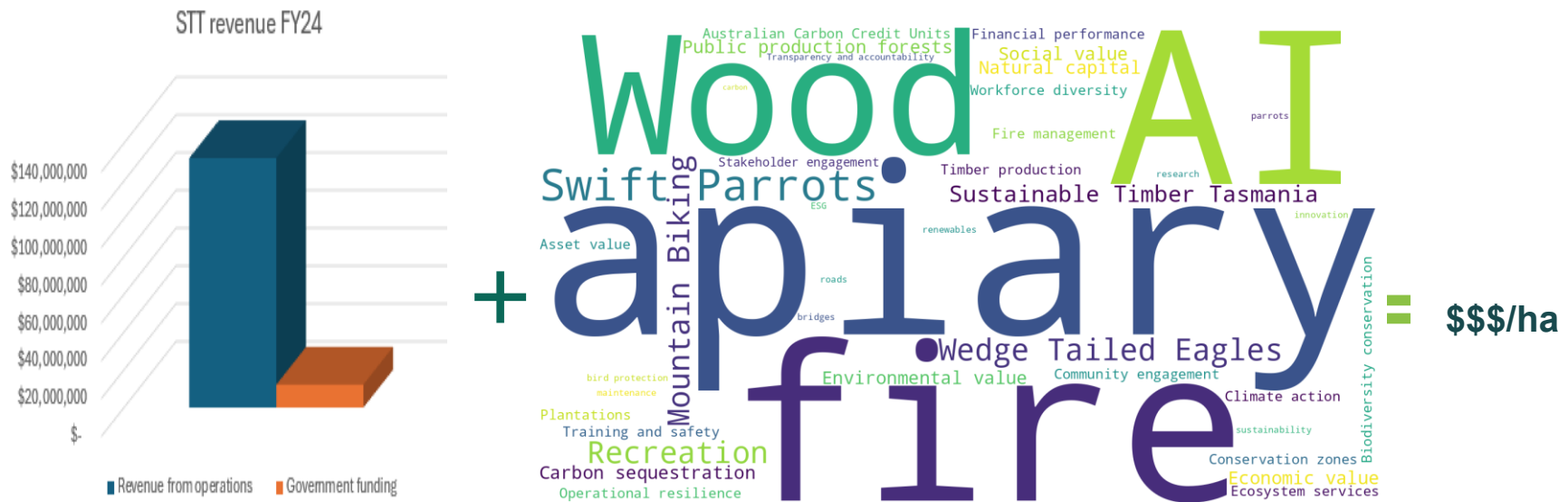
All states are signatories to the Competition Principles Agreement 1995 – known as the competitive neutrality principle

“Government businesses should not enjoy any net competitive advantages over their private sector competitors simply by virtue of public sector ownership”

3. Communications – respect the debate

Public Multiple use forest agencies are requested to deliver a range of services to the community for which they receive some compensation.

But we need to tell our story better – not find a better adjective!



Summary

Great forestry produces the worlds most renewable and sustainable product.

We are part of the climate change solution, not the problem but we need to adapt.

We need to:

1. Include more Indigenous management in our multiple use natural forests
2. Engage the private sector by:
 - i. More transparent and regular log pricing
 - ii. Facilitating opportunities for them to participate in the market
3. Government to facilitate and not dominate the supply to industry
4. Improve our communications Bad things happen when good people say nothing!
5. Too many shoes on the carpet telling boots on the ground what to do!!