

Social license to operate

North East NSW Forestry Hub

August 2023

Prepared for North East Forestry Hub
By StollzNow Research



Report

Social licence to operate

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August 2023

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1 Executive Summary

Overview

Social licence to operate recognises the importance of stakeholders in allowing continued operation of a business. Stakeholders will include 'key opinion leaders', local communities and the general public.

Given the nature of hardwood forestry in NSW which takes place mostly on public land, and the dependence on state government support, social licence to operate is essential.

There are two opposing positions about whether the native forestry industry has social licence which are summarised by the following comments collected in this research:

Native forestry has no social licence

What I would say, and I am very confident in saying it, that there is a serious lack of social licence for the timber industry particularly the Public Forest Estate in NSW. I think that's across the whole of NSW. I'm seeing communities, particularly people who neighbour the public forests, live next door and people who live in regional towns. The timber industry is very visible

Native forestry has social licence

What I've found is when you do talk to people, forgetting the 20 to 30 percent who are completely ideologically opposed, there is no point talking to them about it. I find everyone else when you talk to them about it actually understands it. I think they're easily convinced and easily persuaded in seeing it's a renewable industry in a sense, you cut down a tree and a new tree grows and good carbon sequestration, environmentally sound as long as you do it sustainably

This research will try and find the degree to which social licence exists and if the native forestry industry can operate with support from the community.

Background

From May - July 2023, StollzNow Research was engaged by the North East NSW Forestry Hub to conduct research that would provide some insights into the native forestry's social licence to operate and if there are opportunities for the industry to improve in this area. The research was also designed to understand attitudes towards native forestry, determine the

degree of trust, understand how much people know or care about native forestry, and their awareness of the ENGOs and public campaigns.

The research conducted included:

- 10 x focus groups with members of the public
 - 2 in Sydney
 - 8 in regional areas in North East NSW
- 2,200 surveys
 - 1,194 - North East NSW
 - 1,006 - Greater Sydney
- 19 interviews with Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs)

Key findings

Social licence indicators

The quantitative research has found there are strong indicators that point to the native timber industry having social licence to operate.

Key findings to support this statement are found in the extent of the agreement with the following statements:

- 72%: NSW native forest harvesting is a **legitimate** industry
- 48%: NSW native forest harvesting is an **ethical** industry
- 50%: I **trust** the NSW native timber industry

When those who 'don't know' are removed the responses are:

- 86%: NSW native forest harvesting is a **legitimate** industry
- 68%: NSW native forest harvesting is an **ethical** industry
- 67%: I **trust** the NSW native timber industry

These findings are supported by attitude statements. The top five attitude statements agreed with were (strongly agree/agree):

- 70%: Hardwood timber harvesting is important for rural economies
- 67%: Some of our public native forests should remain available for producing hardwood timber
- 66%: Australia should not import native hardwood from overseas and use its own hardwood timber
- 64%: Selective harvesting only uses a small area of NSW native forests
- 62%: Timber harvesting contributes to the management of State forests

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The future of native forestry harvesting

In the research sixty-nine percent (69%) agreed native forest timber industry is important for NSW. Only seventeen percent (17%) believe the native forest harvesting industry should be closed. This is higher in Greater Sydney (17%) and lower in the North East Region (14%).

Implications of a forced closure of the native forest industry

Participants in the focus groups did not believe this industry could be legitimately closed. The reasons they provided were:

- Timber would have to be imported
 - Timber would come from countries that do not have the same harvesting standards as Australia
 - Australia would be exploiting the forests in third world countries
 - Australia would be destroying the habitats of animals in countries overseas
 - It would make Australia reliant on overseas supply. Australia would lose its autonomy
 - It is unacceptable to import timber and exploit overseas countries because we would have to compromise our own resources
 - Local businesses need to be supported
 - NSW has the capacity; importing is not necessary
- The impact of less timber being used is:
 - Plastics would be used more
 - Australia might have to use inferior wood
 - Cost of housing will increase
 - Jobs will be lost
 - Forests will not be managed as well
 - Alternative to wood would be used and these might be more harmful

Suggestions which could help improve native forestry's social licence to operate

If the native forestry industry would like to improve its social licence to operate, there are some areas discussed in the focus groups they could address with the public. Ones to be considered are:

- Provide information about the process of harvesting in native forests that reassures the public the process is sustainable and forest health is the optimal objective
- Find practical ways to engage people with how forests operate
- Describe how animals are protected during a harvest
- Find ways to communicate information
- Information about how trees will be used; why hardwood is important
- Demonstrate strong leadership

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- Sustainable practices are used
- Traditional landowners are involved and are influencing the management of forests
- There are rules and regulations and if these are not followed there are penalties
- Rogue operators are not tolerated in the industry
- Awareness campaigns: when people buy wood they will know where it was grown

The native forestry industry could also improve its social licence if it is being seen to be innovative, look for alternatives, develop recycling strategies and commit to local communities.

Social issues and the degree to which they impact people's lives

The major social issues that were raised in the focus groups and tested in the quantitative research that are currently impacting on people are:

- 70% - Cost of living
- 59% - The cost of housing, both buying and renting
- 53% - Interest rates
- 47% - Climate change
- 39% - Negativity due to social media, the media and people in general
- 38% - Lack of public services (hospitals, health and public transport)

In the quantitative research eighteen percent (18%) of participants nominated native forestry as a social issue. The issue that was rated the least was offshore detention (9%). Native forestry was not raised as an issue in the focus groups.

Trees, timber and wood products - what these mean to people

Trees, timber and wood products are highly valued. Most participants in the qualitative research enjoy being outside amongst nature and many use these spaces for recreational activities.

Fires were discussed as the biggest threat to forests but there were many discussions about the resilience of forests to recover and thrive despite the destruction a fire brings. Urbanisation is the one threat nature cannot combat.

The biggest concerns to trees and forests are:

- 66% - Bushfires
- 64% - Loss of native habitat
- 50% - Land clearing for new home development
- 34% - Native forestry harvesting
- 27% - Land clearing on farms

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Focus group participants believe wood products are part of their everyday lives and could not imagine a world where wood and wood products could be completely replaced.

Valuing timber products does not necessarily equate to social licence to operate but it does suggest if these products were unavailable or considerably increased in cost, this would be noticed and questioned.

Attitudes towards forestry

The difference between a National Park and a State forest was not always clear to many participants in the focus groups. Some were aware of the difference but many did not have a clear distinction. State forests were discussed as parks that allowed greater community access than a national park plus it could also be a working forest (harvesting).

Forestry is a complicated concept for many participants. Most participants appreciate the need to have timber which can be turned into wood products. It is a renewable product and considered healthy for the environment. That does not mean all want to see the aftermath of a harvest because it is confronting and they are concerned about the welfare of the animals in that area. Those who oppose forestry believe it can be a corrupt industry that has little care for the environment.

All participants are seeking reassurance the industry is ethical and responsible.

Imagery is a powerful mechanism to influence the public

Images were shown to participants in both the focus groups and the online survey.

A variety of images was shown in the focus groups and the responses to these were consistent:

- It confirmed their belief, where it already existed, that native forestry was bad for the environment and the images and information could not be believed
- Many images depicting native forestry are deliberately misleading. Some images were of plantation forestry, not native forestry and should not be believed
- The images were disturbing, but they have reservations about their accuracy. They would like to know where and when the photo was taken, how a section of a forest is selected and how are animals protected.

Three images were shown to participants in the quantitative survey. Each image represented the cycle of native forest harvesting which included a forest before a harvest, after a harvest and seven years after harvest. A third of participants thought the images explained the process well and felt reassured there is a systematic process in place. The main concerns participants have are, the welfare of animals (34%) and the environment is fundamentally changed (30%).

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Images are powerful means of communicating information. Those that use emotionally motivating images create strong responses. There is a percentage of the population that believe images wholeheartedly, there are others who with better understanding of the power of imagery know which images they can accept or reject. The last group are the 'fence sitters'. They are unsure about what to accept or believe but would like more information from a credible source that they could believe.

Information sources

Part of this research included understanding the information sources people relate to. In the focus groups participants were asked about the information sources they use, and which ones they believe.

In each of the focus groups the response was the same; they struggle to find information sources they believe. Mainstream media often is thought to use emotion over fact. Some will use social media sources but the majority thought these were the most unreliable of all. Government bodies are not always trusted but thought to be the most reliable because if they were not factual the government would be accused of lying. Most participants still have faith that government sources will provide the most truthful information.

This finding makes the task of connecting with people difficult.

Participants in the quantitative research thought the most reliable source of information if they wanted to learn about hardwood harvesting in NSW would be the Forestry Corporation (43% agreement). Only nine percent (9%) agreed that 'social media including YouTube' would be reliable.

The challenge for the native forestry industry is to promote their information so it is accessible and meaningful if they are to improve their social licence status in the community.

Koalas

The health status of koalas and many other species is of key importance in the discussion about the viability of native forestry. Key opinion leaders (KOLs) who oppose native forestry discussed how koalas are nearing extinction and the native timber industry is largely responsible for this situation.

Participants in the focus groups mostly believe koalas are under threat, although not all agreed.

KOLs who support native forestry believe there is significant research being conducted on koalas which demonstrates that koalas are found where native forestry exists. They believe the evidence shows the koala habitats are equally plentiful in National Parks as they are in State forests. It is these KOLs' belief that the significant threats to koalas are urbanisation, roadkill, dogs, fires and chlamydia. They believe the information about koalas being close to

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extinction is not true but it is an effective way to entice donations which are used in a multitude of ways to discredit the native forestry industry.

Key opinion leaders

StollzNow Research would like to thank all the KOLs who participated in this research.

The KOLs who participated in this research represented a wide variety of opinions about native forestry in North East NSW.

A brief summary of the main findings from this section of the report are:

- KOLs who do not support the native forestry industry believe it needs to stop immediately for the following reasons: the State forests are degraded almost beyond what is reversible and these forests need to be returned to their natural state; native forestry occurs in the most important part of the forests which can only lead to further degradation; Forestry Corporation is inadequate and does not take care of the State forests properly; State forests are on public land but are costing the taxpayer money and due to mismanagement, species such as the koala are heading towards extinction.
- KOLs who support native forestry do not agree with any of the above propositions. They consider the above points to be misleading, manipulative and disingenuous. They believe they have ample evidence that shows the State forests are in good health and not degraded. There is strong support for the Forestry Corporation and the way they manage the forests, based on evidence-based science. Forestry Corporations management of the forests is heavily regulated and observed and it is served by passionate employees who are committed to maintaining the integrity of the forests. They discussed Forestry Corporation going to extraordinary lengths to ensure species that live within the forest are protected. They understand that occasionally there are mistakes but are constantly trying to minimise these.

Those who support native forestry believe Australia will be significantly compromised if native forestry is forced to close as this will result in the loss of jobs and communities, which will have a deep effect on the lives of many in North East NSW. There are strong concerns about how the timber needs of Australia will be met and a belief that the timber required will need to be imported from other countries whose approach to harvesting trees is compromised by unethical approaches to harvesting. They believe the lack of timber will place even greater pressure on the cost of timber, which in turn makes the building of accommodation that is lacking in the community more expensive and out of the reach of everyday Australians.

Background and research rationale

2 Background and research rationale

North East NSW Forestry Hub (The Hub) is one of eleven Hubs established by the Australian Government across Australia. The Hub, like all Hubs across Australia, is responsible for the following:

- Undertaking a strategic assessment of the factors impacting on their region's forest growing
- Processing sectors and identifying key themes for investigation, in consultation with industry, community and government stakeholders

The Hub has received Commonwealth funding to conduct research into the 'social licence to operate'. This term is referring to the importance of stakeholders in allowing continued operation of a business. Stakeholders will include 'key opinion leaders', local communities and the general public.

The attitudes of forestry and timber industry in North East NSW are varied. The prime objective of this report is to provide a deeper understanding of the public's views on this industry and whether there is sufficient public support for it to continue.

3 Objectives

The aim of the project is to:

- Determine the current state of social licence to operate in native forestry
- Understand attitudes towards native forestry among residents of northern NSW
 - Both positive and negative
- Establish if there are ways of improving social licence to operate in north east NSW
- Identify the drivers of legitimacy, responsibility and trust
- Determine the level of knowledge of native forestry practice
- Identify the attitudes towards organisations that oppose native forestry
- Awareness of public campaigns
- Identify groups of supporters, informed and uninformed, opponents

Approach & methodology

4 Approach & methodology

4.1 Stages of the research project

This research is broken into four parts:

- Desk research
- Qualitative and quantitative research with the general public
- Key opinion leaders (KOLs): 19 in-depth interviews

4.2 Qualitative research

4.2.1 Overview

There is little information available about attitudes to the native forestry industry by residents in both Sydney and North East NSW. The optimal approach to find out the strength of opinions held is to conduct both qualitative (focus groups and in-depth interviews) and quantitative research.

The first state of the research was to undertake desk research so a record of the information in the community can be captured and observed.

The second stage of this research was to conduct focus groups. Focus groups allow for a variety of opinions to be uncovered and the emotional, rational and pragmatic reasons for why these beliefs are held can be understood. This input is then used to create the quantitative survey. The quantitative survey measures the incidence to which people believe or disbelieve the variety of statements and questions they are asked to consider. The qualitative input again comes into play after the completion of the quantitative survey because it provides a rich understanding of the recorded results. It is important to have a combination of understanding and numerical analysis in order to establish the degree to which the public hold these opinions.

Key opinion leaders were included in this research to provide a broader perspective of the native forestry industry. Their collective opinions provide a rich and deep perspective of the strengths and weaknesses of this industry.

4.2.2 Focus groups

It was decided that 10 focus groups would be the optimum number to capture the variety of attitudes to the forestry and timber industry. All focus groups were conducted by Zoom.

Approach & methodology

Residential areas

The focus groups recruited people from the following areas:

- Sydney: 2 x Sydney groups - North/North West and South/Western Sydney
- North Coast: 2 x North coast - Nelson Bay, Forster-Tuncurry, Port Macquarie, Nambucca Heads, Urunga, Coffs Harbour, Yamba, Evans Head, Brunswick Heads, Kingscliff, Tweed Heads
- Forestry: 2 x Forestry and cattle grazing heartland - Dungog, Gloucester, Taree, Wingham, Wauchope, Kempsey, Kendall, Dorrigo, Grafton, Casino, Kyogle, Murwillumbah, Woodenbong, Tabulam, Urbenville
- Newcastle: 1 x Newcastle
- Lower Hunter: 1 x Lower Hunter - Singleton, Cessnock, Morisset, Toronto, Maitland, Beresfield, Kurri Kurri, Raymond Terrace, Heatherbrae.
- Tablelands: 1 x Tablelands - Nowendoc, Walcha, Armidale, Glen Innes, Tenterfield, Guyra,
- Greenbelt: 1 x Greenbelt - Bellingen, Ballina, Byron Bay, Bangalow, Nimbin, The Channon, Mullumbimby

Demographics

- 50% male/female
- Range of ages: 18 - 75
 - 5 x 18 - 30 years
 - 15 x 31 - 50
 - 15 x 51 - 65
 - 5 x 66 - 75
- At least 30/40 employed (part time or casual)

Dates

The focus groups were held on the following dates:

- Wednesday 26 April
- Thursday 27 April x 2
- Saturday 29 April x 1
- Wednesday 3 May x 2
- Thursday 4 May x 2
- Monday 8 May x 2
- Wednesday 9 May x 1

Approach & methodology

Other details

- Focus group participants were recruited through Research Connections
- Participants were paid \$100 for their time
- 5 people were recruited per group
 - Five groups had 5 participants, three groups had 4 and one group had 3 participants
- Each group took between 1.5 and 2 hours
- All groups were recorded
- All groups were moderated by Giselle Stollznow
- All groups were transcribed by Olympia Constructions
- The discussion guide was created by both StollzNow Research and The Hub
 - Each group followed the same discussion guide

Screeener

A screener question was put in place to ensure the people participating in the groups were valid respondents. The questions asked in the screener covered the following areas:

- Appropriate demographic
 - Live in appropriate region
 - Age and gender were balanced
 - Lived in the local area for at least 3 years
- People who could not participate in this research work in:
 - The forestry industry
 - The environmental Industry
 - Media/advertising/journalism
- The list of working groups that participants could choose from were:
 - Retail
 - Mining
 - Hospitality
 - Manufacturing
 - Services
 - Construction
 - Finance and insurance
 - Health care
 - Transport
 - Education
 - Other

4.2.3 Key Opinion Leaders

19 key opinion leaders (KOLs) were randomly recruited from a list The Hub provided to StollzNow Research. There were over 200 suggestions provided on an Excel spreadsheet and from this list, it was left to StollzNow Research to determine which ones would be approached. StollzNow Research attempted to recruit participants from each of the following groups:

- Timber business owners
- Other business owners
- ENGOs
- Commonwealth government officials
- State government officials
- Other community leaders
- University and government research
- Media
- Federal politicians
- State politicians
- Local government mayors

StollzNow Research initially reduced the list to 20 potential participants. This list expanded when potential participants either declined or did not respond. Three attempts were made to those who did not respond before a new potential participant was selected.

Participants were given the opportunity to participate in an interview in two ways:

- Telephone
- Video conferencing (Zoom or Teams)
 - The majority of participants chose this option

Video conferencing interviews were recorded (with the participants permission) and transcribed (Olympia Constructions) and notes were taken for the telephone interviews.

Interviews took from 15 minutes to 90 minutes.

The discussion guide was not as structured for these interviews as the participants focussed on the areas where they connect with the native forestry industry.

The qualitative research was carried out in compliance with ISO 20252

4.3 Quantitative research approach and methodology

4.3.1 Quantitative overview

The importance of the qualitative research in understanding the range of issues and how people understand issues cannot be understated. The quantitative stage will measure the incidence of issues, and how they develop or detract from the key elements of legitimacy, credibility and trust.

4.3.2 Quantitative methodology

The methodology was online self-completion surveys using online panels. Online panels are comprised of people who say they will answer surveys on any topic from time to time.

Despite the fact that people must join an online panel and then choose to complete a survey (non-probability sample), experience shows they have a high degree of accuracy. Whenever we have been able to compare online panel data to real-world known data, panels have proved to be in close alignment.

In recent research for a new hospital development in ACT, the research had the correct incidence for those who worked at Canberra Hospital to within 500 people (staff levels around 6,500 people). A survey on the incidence of smoking cigarettes was within 0.01% of another survey carried out by the Institute of Health and Welfare.

4.3.3 Sample size and confidence level

The sample size for the full survey is $n=2,200$. This gives a confidence level of $\pm 2.1\%$ at the 95% confidence level.

In practice there will be two sample groups that will be analysed independently:

- Residents of North East region as defined $n=1,194$
 - Confidence level of $\pm 2.8\%$ at the 95% confidence level
- Greater Sydney residents $n=1,006$
 - Confidence level of $\pm 3.1\%$ at the 95% confidence level

To achieve this sample size in the North East region we have worked with our main online panel partner Pureprofile to combine five panels to gain this sample size. Responses were managed through the Pureprofile portal, so there is no chance of people being completing the survey twice.

The North East Region includes the areas of:

- Richmond-Tweed
- Coffs Harbour - Grafton

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- Mid North Coast
- Hunter Valley excluding Newcastle
- Newcastle

Quotas were set in the survey to have the correct percentage of population living in each of these regions represented in the data.

Greater Sydney includes the areas of:

- Sydney Metropolitan area
- Blue Mountains
- Central Coast

Again, quotas were set in the survey to have the correct percentage of population living in each of these regions represented in the data. This area is based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics areas for Greater Sydney.

4.3.4 Weighting of data

The two sample sizes of 1,200 from the North East Region and Greater Sydney mean that without weighting the input from the North East Region is greater than the residents of Greater Sydney. To allow projection to the full population of all residents from both areas each of these areas was weighted in the data.

The weighting is based on Australian Bureau of Statistics population data for each region.

Table 1: Weighting of data

Region	Population	Weighting
Greater Sydney	5,231,147	79.9%
North East	1,314,688	20.1%
Total	6,545,835	100.0%

The weighing only affects data when looked at in total.

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4.3.5 Analysis

Analysis was carried out by cross-tabulation. The cross-tabulations used for analysis of all data is shown below. Additional cross-tabulations were carried out for some questions.

Table 2: Cross-tabulation (standard)

		%	n
	NET	100	2200
REGION GROUPED	Greater Sydney	46	1006
	North East Region	54	1194
Q2 Region	Sydney metropolitan area	42	923
	Blue Mountains	1	16
	Central Coast	3	67
	Richmond - Tweed	10	219
	Coffs Harbour - Grafton	6	138
	Mid North Coast	10	225
	Hunter Valley - excluding Newcastle	12	267
	Newcastle and Lake Macquarie	16	345
Q AGE GROUPED	Under 30 years	20	440
	30 to 49 years	38	830
	Over 50 years	42	930
Q5 Gender	Female	53	1170
	Male	47	1028
	Gender diverse	0	2

4.3.6 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was developed following the qualitative stage of focus groups with the general public in North East and Sydney areas.

Areas that will obviously be included are:

- Current levels of industry legitimacy, credibility and trust
- Ratings of the industry on elements that come from the qualitative research
- Demographics

Approach & methodology

4.3.7 Fieldwork period

Fieldwork commenced on 20 July 2023 and concluded on 3 August 2023.

4.3.8 Response rate

Of those who were not screened out from the survey by either a quota having been met or not meeting the selection criteria, only two percent (2%) or $n=58$ did not complete the survey. This is low compared to other surveys where we have an expectation that around five percent (5%) will not complete the survey.

Table 3: Response rate

	%	n
Complete	83	2200
Incomplete	2	58
Screen out	11	291
Quota out	4	93
NET	100	2642

4.3.9 Representativeness of the data

The research is designed to be projectable to the full adult population of Greater Sydney and the North East Region of NSW.

Included in the survey were questions to assess that the survey incorporated an appropriate cross section of the community. These are:

- Those identifying as having a disability (10%)
- Those who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders (ATSI) (4%)
- Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)
 - Those from a non-English speaking background (NESB) (23%)
 - Cultural background (non-‘Australian’ background 42%)

The findings show that three percent (4%) identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Australian Bureau of Statistics data for NSW shows this cohort as 3.4% of the population (2021 Census which includes all of NSW).

Other data is hard to quantify but the findings show a diverse range of inputs from society.

We have a high level of confidence that the findings can be projected to the full adult population of Greater Sydney and the North East region of NSW.

Approach & methodology

4.3.10 Compliance with standards

The quantitative research complies with ISO 20252, The Research Society Code of Professional Behaviour and the Privacy Act.

4.3.11 Understanding the data

Colours in tables

Some data is shown in tables with colour coding. In these, blue is above the average, black on the average, and red below average.

Rounding error

All numbers in the data are calculated to nine decimal points.

Charts and tables show numbers rounded to the nearest whole number. For example, 51.1 to 51.4 are shown as 51 while 5.5 to 51.9 are shown as 52.

In adding together data we have used the full nine-digit number to calculate the addition. In some cases, this will mean that the total number used in tables and charts is not the same as simply adding the numbers in the charts and tables together.

We use this method as it is the most accurate way to report the key findings.

This will sometimes mean that adding with a calculator will give an apparent total of 99 or 101.

Use of an index

In some cases rating questions are shown as in index (score from 0 to 100).

In rating questions where there is a 'don't know' option this is removed in numeric analysis (index). The score needs to be 0 to 10 to create an index.

4.4 Research limitations and considerations

The limitations of the qualitative research are:

- ENGOs lack of response to approaches to participate in this research
 - Only 3 ENGOs participated. 9 in total were approached. Most declined and some did not respond
 - Qualitative research findings cannot be projected onto the overall population, due to sample selection, interviewing methods and sample size

The limitations of the quantitative research are:

- Use of online panels which are a non-probability sample

The reporting of information is designed to be factual and non-biased. Every attempt has been made to present the information without commentary or judgement.

Social licence to operate

5 Social licence to operate

5.1 Qualitative findings

5.1.1 Qualitative social licence to operate summary

This research set out to understand if the native forestry industry has social licence to operate. Social licence is defined as the community's willingness to accept the industry and the forestry of hardwood in State forests.

The conclusion drawn from the discussions within the focus groups and the quantitative research is that the timber industry will have the support of most of the community. If the industry is to improve their relationship with the community, there are some areas they need to address to improve their image. The community is seeking information, clarification and reassurance around issues that have been raised in this research.

5.1.2 Issues raised

Contribution to the environment

Participants would like reassurance about harvesting and the approaches taken to collect and process hardwood. The word 'sustainability' is consistently used; sustainability for these participants seems to include preservation of the land where the trees have been taken and the approach to the replanting or rehabilitating of that area.

I guess for me the biggest part of the management of it is to make sure that the replacement is done that there is really good monitoring on if we're going to be cutting trees and we do need it that the replacing of them and the management of that is really focused and transparent [Sydney]

Making sure they're putting as much if not more than what they're taking. To be honest more is probably better because we are growing as a population [Lower Hunter]

If they take 100 trees plant 110, especially because they are taking 20 or 30 years to come around. There is going to be more people that will need that in 20 years that need it now. Thinking about the future and as I said what we're going to need in 20 or 30 years [Lower Hunter]

These comments are from participants who, through lack of any alternative information are assuming planting more trees is the optimal way to regenerate the forest where the trees have been taken. Participants are looking to the industry to provide information about how the State forests are being protected against future deterioration, and it would appear part of the education is informing people that 'more trees' is not necessarily beneficial to the working forest.

Social licence to operate

When information is provided, as is the case for one of these participants, the attitude to native forestry is very different to those who are not involved or engaged with the industry but have formed strong opinions. One participant who lives in Grafton discussed the length the local council goes to, to keep the community informed about how they are managing the forests. This council always has cameras in the forests so the community can go to the council website and get an up-to-date account of what is happening within the forest, and when harvesting or any other changes will happen. This participant finds this practice to be reassuring and makes them feel confident the forest is being looked after.

Yes, you can see it all happening, nobody gets really upset, nobody gets really offended, they can see what's getting removed and all of the locals like it because they know it's getting maintained and depending on what people do, a lot of people have motorbikes or quads in the area, so they know when trees have gone down and there is a lot of saw dust, so that's a good area to take. They get a lot of the younger kids practice riding because they know it's clear, and it's safe, there are proper tracks, it's not too overgrown. We're lucky where we are [Forestry]

They just have Facebook links. It might be that we have got Copmanhurst news, even when I was at Nana Glen they just share it from the council's website and you can view it, there is 24 cameras and there are also 24 cameras of our waterways so you can check when there is flooding in case you can't travel. There are lots of different things that I feel that the Clarence has done that I really like. They care about what's happening in their area [Forestry]

Animal protection

The protection and consideration of animals is perhaps the biggest issue for many of these participants. Innocent animals having their habitats destroyed is upsetting. Animals being killed during the process is unacceptable. There is concern for koalas, but there is concern for all animals living in these areas. Participants want to know what processes and procedures are in place before and after a harvest that are designed to protect the animals whose habitats are destroyed.

I think as long as it's being done ethically and by ethically I mean you're looking after our native wildlife, it's really important. You want to make sure that you're not disturbing anything, and you would want to hope that rather than demolishing in an area where there is a species of bird that they might not have noticed, they'd go to a different area or at least keep that area a little bit safe [Forestry]

Information

Quality information is difficult to source, read and believe (see section 7.11). Participants do not believe there is one source they have complete confidence in, with most sceptical of information presented to them. Each information source has a limitation and participants discussed how confusing the volume of information can be.

Social licence to operate

If the timber industry is to have the support of the community, it needs to provide information that is balanced and educational. It would help if this information were verified by other respected sources.

If the truth was out there explaining what was going on I think people would accept it a lot more. That's just when I say truth that's what I mean. Tell us everything so that we've got nothing to go against [Newcastle]

I agree and for me it would be having the facts from an unbiased source, if that's even possible. Explained in a more user-friendly way for people like us who aren't experts so that we can form an opinion and feel like they're doing the right thing or not doing the right thing [Newcastle]

We don't know how much is being logged, do we. I'd like to know the figures, number one and how much area is cleared and those sorts of thing, I'd like to know how much is being produced each year and how much area is cleared and how long it would take that area to regrow. That's what would make me have confidence in logging. That's the way I think [North Coast]

There was some discussion around the inconsistency of human beings; they can become upset about trees being harvested but eat meat and consume other products which are equally bad if not arguably worse (for some people) for the environment. Those who consider themselves 'pragmatic' were self-aware enough to discuss how the emotional arguments are easy to believe, but if there is consistent alternative information provided then it will be easier for them to hold a balanced opinion about the native timber industry.

It's a funny one too, we're looking at forestry and wood and we use wood products all the time. There is the old argument of do we worry about cows being killed because someone wants to have a steak on the barbie. It's that same thing we utilise these things. We're just used to one thing more than another. It's not something we hear about a great deal, as much as we probably could do. It's very easy to look at these situations where you've got the activist that handcuffs himself to a tractor and says don't do this and it's very extreme and you get people jumping on one side of the boat or the other without really knowing much about it. Knowledge makes things a bit easier for people to understand [Newcastle]

There are some who are of the opinion that the forestry industry has been poor at providing an alternative opinion and should, if they want to be persuasive, provide information about this topic. One participant went further to suggest the industry joins forces with the 'government' and provide information that is helpful, accurate and informative.

What I think forestry is an essential primary industry. I don't think we can have viable timber industry without having trees grown locally and cut down locally but in a responsible fashion. This discussion has reminded me about how bad the private timber industry has been about managing its public image and perception. And the most telling examples is when we see pictures of forests that have been illegally logged by rapacious land owners or rapacious companies; I think the industry should

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join with Government to have an intelligent policy, I don't think we can get by without timber grown locally. But it could be done better perhaps [Sydney]

Transparency

Discussions took place in all focus groups about the need for the industry to be transparent. Transparency means communicating the truth about the industry and not trying to conceal any unpleasant aspects of the processes that take place.

To touch on that possibly an independent study on how forests have acted, the impacts whether good or bad from them. I know it's probably not going to be all great, but the rejuvenation does bring back wildlife and the same numbers of animals are back there even though some are lost through the cutting down of the timber. An independent study to lay out the good and the bad or the facts. You can be educated on it [Newcastle]

Transparency is also gained from information that is factual and honest. The participants who did not believe the information provided to them that is positive about the industry in the focus groups felt there was not enough detail and when combined with their own beliefs was not believable. Some participants want information they can believe. If hardwood trees are to be 'logged' then provide accurate information about what those trees will be used for. This transparency, in their eyes, could help them to understand the importance of this resource and feel less antagonism towards it.

I think what I would like to see and this applies to society in general politics particularly at the moment is a bit of honesty, if you turn around and say to me 12% of this available for logging I'd really like to know what that means. 12% of what the state is X amount of square metres of forest we have chosen X amount as forest able and of that we have taken so much more and this would provide 15,000 houses blah, blah, blah, bridges etc, etc. Just be really honest and transparent about what you're saying and leave us to make that decision as to whether we'll back you or not and the same goes for the other side [Green]

Leadership

Strong leadership needs to be visible for some participants. Many believe native forestry is a necessary industry but not all agree it is beyond corruption or poor guidance. There is for some currently a lack of belief native timber forestry is a regulated industry which leads to comments like the one below. Leadership is not seen as being strong in the forestry industry therefore it is open to corruption.

There's no way we can abolish the industry it's like taking away oil it's not going to happen. It's necessary it's needed. In a perfect world yeah we would have the regulation like that graph that we saw with thinning and back burning but unfortunately we don't have a higher power to hold it accountable and even if we did I don't trust it not to receive a Jaguar each year or whatever [Sydney]

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Good leadership is demonstrated when an industry has a broad range of skills and talents working within it and all are trying to manage the working forest well from an environmental perspective. If there are multiple inputs then it shows those leading have the confidence in multiple inputs as opposed to a closed working group which does not lead to the best outcomes.

They have the right people working for them [North Coast]

They probably should employ more environmental scientists. They probably only employ one for each region, maybe at least five and they collaborate. Maybe they might have different specialities, instead of just one in the whole unit that is covering half the state, that's just not good enough [North Coast]

The most optimistic participants would like to see Australia be a world leader in native forestry. This status will indicate the industry is strongly led, and it would definitely provide the platform for 'social licence to operate' because other countries looking to Australia for inspiration means it would be considered to be using best practices.

I think the message to get across is that Australia has an opportunity to be a world leader in sustainable forestry industry and to look at the big picture about reducing the need for timber and recycling as much as possible. And active reforestation of certain parts of Australia which can supply timber for the future but also preserve areas that grow forest and habitats [Sydney]

Sustainable/best practice

Some participants in these focus groups discussed how they felt the industry has to be looking after the forests properly because it is in their best interest to do so. Other participants feel there is far too much 'logging' occurring in the State forests and believe the forests are poorly managed by people who are not following best practice.

Regardless of how invested a participant is in forestry, all would like to know and have confidence in the way the forests are managed. Is it a sustainable approach? What will the forests look like in the future? Are the practices in Australia better or worse than overseas. Are native forests subject to clear felling or is there a different and better approach?

Many questions currently cannot be answered and if the native forestry industry is to continue to operate, some if not all of these questions need to be answered.

And some proof that what they are doing is sustainable. When they log an area they can show that it does grow back to the same standard as it was before [North Coast]

Traditional landowners' involvement

There is a consistent interest for traditional landowners to be involved in the management of native forests. Participants in all groups discussed how they would feel more confident if traditional landowners had key roles in the management of forest, particularly around the hazard reduction decisions. It is felt this group effectively managed the country for thousands

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of years before it was inhabited by Europeans, and they would like to see a shift back and involvement of the community who genuinely understands the forests.

There's no management per se as it is at the moment if the forests had been managed those bush fires would not have been so horrendous; once again that's where the Aboriginals knowledge is so important [Sydney]

Rules

Participants would like to know who the rule makers are for native forestry. Few knew about the Forestry Corporation and no one discussed who controls native forestry in any depth which means little is known about the decision-making structure. This has a level of concern for the industry because by being unsure if the rules that govern this industry are strict, it is unknown if the rules are administered and checked or are those involved in the timber industry ruthless and self-serving.

Participants have little to no knowledge about the 'rules' around how much land can be harvested each year and how the working forest is managed. In the absence of any knowledge or insight they assume the worst. If forestry is to continue then information needs to be more available. Trust will come from reassurance by significant agencies that the rules and guidelines associated with native forestry are being adhered to and enforced.

I think going back to that 12% thing if that can stay at 12% it is not in five years' time okay now we have destroyed the 12% now we need 15 now we need 20, now we need 25; if they put in its 12% for next 50 years or whatever maybe they have to think okay we have to be sustainable because we're not getting any more [Sydney]

Rogue operators

Those who do not like the industry believe there are unscrupulous operators who will take advantage of being able to log trees in areas that are not always visible to the public. Other participants believe those involved in the industry have a vested interest in making sure it is run professionally as their livelihood depends on ethical and sound management.

Participants are seeking reassurance that there are no rogue operators, and those who are not operating appropriately are managed and if they are seriously corrupt or dishonest then they will not be allowed to operate. If the industry can demonstrate it is not one that tolerates rogue operators then this will help build trust in the industry.

It might not have 50 years ago but now as I said that things need to be transparent, I don't think they can get away with it. There's obviously some rogue operators but as a whole ... [Tablelands]

Participants are also interested in whether fines are handed out, and if they are, do they have any impact and deter operators from not following the guidelines. Currently there is little belief by some participants that a process is enforced and some would be surprised if there was even a process in place.

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You mentioned about them not logging things they should, and they get fined thousands of dollars, who gets fined? The people chopping don't get fined, the business gets fined, Forestry gets fined, who cares, they don't care [North Coast]

Awareness of timber sources

Most participants do not think about timber, where it comes from or if in the collection of it, any environmental damage is done in the process. Most people have a level of tolerance for the unpleasant aspects humans needs create.

A few participants did discuss how it could be beneficial if there was an awareness campaign so the purchasers could be better informed about the timber they are buying; where it has come from and if that source is sustainable.

Many people may still select the cheapest option but some feel they could be swayed to pay more to ensure the source is appropriate.

I think as well, price like a lot of things the old made in China sort of thing you know your stuff is from China but you just don't care because it's just where it came from, that's how I see it at least. I don't really look where it comes from [Sydney]

I also think it's how its sold, what I mean is the PR perspective of it if you give someone two choices you could do it well in Australia or we could get it from the Amazon, people will go okay well these are the choices here I prefer to have control of it and have it come from Australia because I know at least we have got some basic principles around management. Or as if you just show people okay this is what it looks like in Australia you show the felled trees well nobody wants that so it's also about how you package it to tell the story around the conservation, the management, how it is going to happen; it's taking people on a journey as well to understand okay we need to get our wood from somewhere it's better that we do it ourselves. This is better for us and better for the environment than trusting other people to manage it and bring it even though it might be cheaper [Sydney]

5.1.3 Positive aspects of forestry

Appreciate wood

Not all participants believe the forestry industry is performing poorly or needs to improve. Many believe it is a necessary industry, most people have wood in their houses, it is long lasting and aesthetically appeals to them. They envisage wood will continue to be in demand and the only request is that it is harvested and managed appropriately.

When it comes to foresting with me, I think it's good, good and bad in a way. As long as people are maintaining their stuff, if you look around nearly every house has wood in it. Nearly almost every house has wood, besides some people that are anti-wood, most people have wood in their house because it is lasting, it looks nice, you can do so much stuff to it [North Coast]

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City hypocrisy

There is a belief that people in ‘the cities’ do not understand the needs of those in rural areas. They find it hypocritical that people who are living on cleared land can have an opinion on whether land outside of their immediate area should be cleared or not. In the groups some believed there are enough trees for native forestry to continue and the amount that are harvested will not have an ongoing impact.

That’s all I personally like. I think it’s very easy for people who live in the cities who are already in these cleared areas to say, I don’t like you cutting down trees, you don’t live out here, there are plenty of them [Forestry]

Forestry is considerate

Some participants believe that those in the forestry industry do try and protect animals, particularly the koalas. They feel it is in their interest to keep the forests functioning and therefore are managing them well.

I feel that forestry would be the same, they are just people who are trying to do their jobs and it’s not one bad person, a big organisation that is made up of a lot of different people. At the end of the day, they are people like you and me and they’re going to want to do their best. They are not wanting to clear these large areas and run koalas off their homes, I don’t think it’s like that. Unfortunately, when people are not educated on the matter properly, that’s how they see it [Forestry]

Trust the industry

Participants either had trust in forestry or they did not. For some participants, forestry is a far less environmentally threatening industry than others, for example mining. Additionally, the livelihood of those working in the industry depends on it operating effectively; these participants see no value in those working within the industry and not treating it properly. Forestry is not an industry they had considered to be untrustworthy.

I think because forests are part of our environmental concern particularly with bushfires. I think there is a lot more trust surrounding because the information has to be a lot more accurate and a lot more open. If it was mining it would be a different matter but for forestry’s yes not a hassle [Tablelands]

Well above 50% yes I would say I trust them I don’t have a full trust level for most things because as Chris said there is always someone rogue. I think it’s in their better interest to do it right because if you don’t you’re entire livelihood is at stake, if you gut it you’ve ruined everything. If you left them to their own devices they probably would clear the entire forest like Brazil but I think most of us here are smart enough to learn that that is a stupid way to make a dollar for two years and have no jobs for 40. I don’t think we’d be that dumb [Tablelands]

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Alternatives unappealing

In each focus group the concept of the environmental impact of wood was discussed. The issue for many participants is that it is easy to discuss how wood is not environmentally friendly, but it is thought to be better than the alternatives. For these participants, if timber is not available, what is a better option?

I know that we use wood in timber framing, if we didn't have that what is the option, steel, which is again raping earth? Either way you turn, you're between a rock and a hard place [North Coast]

5.1.4 Industry leadership opportunities

Some participants feel there is room for the native forestry industry to improve their public image. The suggestions made by participants are being an industry that considers alternatives, is aware more recycling or re-purposing could take place and become more involved in the community. If native forestry can be a thought leader, a 'reasonable voice' and be open to change, then this could contribute to an improvement in how they are perceived or provide a platform for them to be seen and heard. This helps them to trust which leads to the social license to operate.

Alternative sources

There is an appetite among some participants to see alternative sources to wood being used. Hemp is one that is mentioned a few times in various groups.

If the industry is aware of potential alternatives or if there are innovative ways to produce or use timber, then it is important for the industry to communicate the benefits or negatives or looking at alternatives. This explanation cannot be complicated as technical information is difficult to interpret.

Participants want the industry to be upfront and address issues such as these if they are to have confidence in the industry and support it.

Looking at different species of what we can use. I haven't looked into it but as far as from what I hear from friends, particularly those that talk about hemp being an amazing product, it's incredibly renewable, it grows a lot faster, it has the same qualities and same capabilities as any other wood so it may alleviate a lot of the high demand we're seeing as well [Lower Hunter]

Recycling/re-purposing

The industry could also make some inroads in social licence if it could find some ways to improve wood recycling. Many industries are having to adapt to the new order which is to preserve and re-use resources. Many feel timber is no different and has many opportunities along the pathway of timber use to recycle. Building sites is one area where it is believed wastage occurs; rather than take the wood to become landfill, see if it cannot be used in

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some other way. If it can, the industry will be seen to be providing avenues for re-purposing and/or recycling and this means will lessen the reliance on growing and harvesting more trees.

I guess talking about renewable recycling wood should be part of the building industry and forest industry priority to cut on demand. But just the whole thing about we're running out of time sustainability we should be planting trees all over the country [Sydney]

I think a lot of it comes down to that matter of sustainability, what is sustainable. My husband and I we have a hair salon for instance and one of our key focuses is up to 95% of our waste is recycled. Even the chemicals they are neutralised, it gets turned into water for roads. All foil gets recycled, the hair gets used for hair booms for oil spills in the ocean. Anyone that wants to donate more than 20cm of their hair it can be donated for kids with alopecia and cancer. Having that social consciousness is important. We need to be mindful of part of life is we require those resources. We can certainly find different avenues, it doesn't need to be 100% wood, we can look at other options there, we're starting to see it with plastics [Sydney]

Community contributions

Some participants feel the industry could make contributions alongside their commitment to manage the native forests appropriately. Many hold the belief more trees need to be planted; they are concerned about climate change and ensuring there is enough tree life is imperative. From these participants' perspective, contributing to the environment by donating seedlings or growing trees in other areas demonstrates their community conscious plus it will help the environment.

It needs to be re-examined and certainly anything can be done sustainably if it is done properly, we can't be chopping down and not replacing, we have an oxygen problem we have a global warming problem we can't seem to contribute into that. The Amazon region supply 80% of the world's oxygen maybe half of its gone, what's that doing to climate warming. We can do these things responsibly but we should be not replacing we should be putting in more trees. The forest industry could be doing actually supplying seedlings to put in some parks and things as well saying we're looking at the bigger picture here [Sydney]

5.1.5 Constructive conversations

There is a growing weariness among some participants with the 'at loggerheads' approach to many topics. These participants wish there could be better more constructive conversations between 'environmentalists' and those working within the industry. The different opinions concern them and forces them to not believe either group. They are looking to each side of the argument to make some sensible concessions.

Forestry and logging people need to talk with the environmentalists and come to a decision that's in the middle [Forestry]

Social licence to operate

5.2 Quantitative findings

5.2.1 Quantitative overview and conclusion

The three key elements of social licence to operate are legitimacy, credibility and trust.

In the research these three elements were defined by the statements:

- NSW native forest harvesting is a legitimate industry
- NSW native forest harvesting is an ethical industry
- I trust the NSW native timber industry

If social licence to operate is defined as more than half of residents, then native forest harvesting is seen as a legitimate industry both with and without those who do not know.

Removing those who ‘don’t know’ shows that the majority agree that native forest harvesting is:

- A legitimate industry
- An ethical industry
- A trustworthy industry

Native forest harvesting has social licence to operate when allowing for those that are not familiar with the industry and unable to have an opinion either positive or negative.

5.2.2 Social licence to operate findings

Research participants were asked to rate the three statements on a four-point Likert Scale with an option for ‘don’t know’.

Table 4: Q26 Social licence statement agreements Base: 2,200

Column %	NSW native forest harvesting is a legitimate industry	NSW native forest harvesting is an ethical industry	I trust the NSW native timber industry
Strongly Agree	9	6	6
Agree	62	42	44
Disagree	9	18	19
Strongly disagree	2	4	5
Don't know	17	30	25
AGREE	72	48	50
DISAGREE	11	22	24

Base: all research participants (weighted)

Social licence to operate

Total agreement with each statement (strongly agree/agree) is:

- NSW native forest harvesting is a legitimate industry
 - Agree - 72%
 - Disagree - 11%
 - Don't know - 17%
- *NSW native forest harvesting is an ethical industry*
 - Agree - 48%
 - Disagree - 22%
 - Don't know - 30%
- *I trust the NSW native timber industry*
 - Agree - 50%
 - Disagree - 24%
 - Don't know - 25%

The level of agreement that forest harvesting is an ethical industry is lower due to the thirty percent (30%) that 'don't know'. One quarter (25%) do not know if they trust the NSW native timber industry.

There are differences by region for two statements:

- Agree (strongly agree/agree) *NSW native forest harvesting is a legitimate industry*
 - Greater Sydney - 71%
 - North East region - 75%
 - Mid-North Coast - 80%
- Agree (strongly agree/agree) *I trust the NSW native timber industry*
 - Richmond-Tweed - 41%
 - Lower than average

The large percentage of people who do not know whether they agree or disagree shows that there is a lack of knowledge in the community about native timber harvesting.

The only statistically significant regional differences in 'don't know' responses are:

- *NSW native forest harvesting is a legitimate industry*
 - Greater Sydney - 18%
 - North East region - 14%
 - Mid-North Coast - 11%
- *I trust the NSW native timber industry*
 - Hunter Valley - 33%

Social licence to operate

This is not surprising as native timber harvesting is not a high interest topic, as later findings show.

Removing the ‘don’t know’ responses show the data for those who have a view either positive or negative towards the native harvesting industry.

Table 5: Q26 Social licence statements

Base :2,200

Column %	NSW native forest harvesting is a legitimate industry	NSW native forest harvesting is an ethical industry	I trust the NSW native timber industry
Strongly Agree	11	9	8
Agree	75	59	59
Disagree	11	26	26
Strongly disagree	3	6	7
AGREE	86	68	67
DISAGREE	14	32	33

Base: ‘don’t know’ for each statement removed (weighted)

Without those who ‘don’t know’ whether they agree or disagree with each statement the results are positive for NSW native forest harvesting, with total agreement (strongly agree/agree) as:

- *NSW native forest harvesting is a legitimate industry*
 - Agree - 86%
 - Disagree - 14%
- *NSW native forest harvesting is an ethical industry*
 - Agree - 68%
 - Disagree - 32%
- *I trust the NSW native timber industry*
 - Agree - 67%
 - Disagree - 33%

When analysed by regions removing ‘don’t know’ responses shows that there is no statistically significant difference by any area.

The future of hardwood harvesting

6 The future of native hardwood harvesting

6.1 Qualitative findings

6.1.1 Qualitative overview and conclusions

The concept of social licence to operate was explored.

Participants having been through the process of discussing the native forestry industry, what it is, what it does, the various attitudes towards it, were then asked, what would happen if this industry were closed down.

This section of the report is relaying the feedback from focus groups. Participants were asked to consider the following topics:

- What are the possible implications if the industry is no longer allowed to operate in State forests
- How did each participant feel about the prospect of importing hardwood timber

Participants in all focus groups rejected the concept Australia should import hardwood from other countries. The main concern focussed on the perceived exploitation of countries such as Indonesia, Borneo, Papua New Guinea, South Pacific and the Amazon. Participants do not believe these countries have sustainable practices in place and are not appropriately protecting their forests.

6.1.2 Importing hardwood

The objections raised included:

Many countries do not have sustainable practices

Australia is thought to have high standards even by those who do not fully support the native forestry industry. If hardwood was to be imported it would have to be from a country with similar standards to Australia and have sustainable practices.

I was unaware of that, that's disturbing to me and not knowing where it comes from. Knowing where your food comes from, knowing where your coffee comes from, to make sure it's from a sustainable source [Forestry]

Also, I don't know for sure, but I can't imagine that it would necessarily be more sustainable to import timber because then it's coming from somewhere else that might not have the rules and regulations. It has to get here, without knowing much about it that doesn't necessarily sound like a better option [Newcastle]

It depends whether Japan wants to sell it back to us that's about where we fall or whether we just let Brazil annihilate its entire country because now they're the only supplier of wood but it's a replenished resource because they don't give a hoot, or

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Indonesia cotton on and wipe out half the rainforest because we don't sell wood anymore [Tablelands]

It's better to be the person that does it properly than just let someone else fill the glut and completely ruin it [Tablelands]

Ethical and legal principles

There is concern about the countries where hardwood could potentially be sourced from. The news is regularly providing information about the destruction of forests in overseas countries and this does not sit well with most participants. It is disagreeable to these participants that hardwood should be imported from these countries and even worse if they are unaware of that it is happening.

Well we should have a domestic industry because it's a hedge against what happens internationally it's like having a fuel policy for example. And we just need to be like the people that are very careful where the clothes come from like Nike buys clothes from sustainable ethical producers. I think we need to have national policies that we do not allow wood that comes from an illegal forest to come into the country. Illegal logging it's happening in New Guinea for example, illegal logging that's happening in the Pacific Islands, the illegal logging that is happening in Indonesia, illegal logging that is happening in the Amazon. You cut down a tree other than working out what species of tree it is whether it's hardwood or softwood you have no way of knowing provenance so when you go to Bunnings and buy a piece of wood you have no way of knowing where it came from. And I think that is not right. We changed it with beef, we now track beef that's produced so that we know where it comes from. We could do the same for timber [Sydney]

Evidence of non-sustainable practices

A participant discussed their experience in Borneo where they saw clear felling of forests to make way for palm oil plantations. This participant found their experience deeply disturbing. They and the others in the focus group on hear this account found the prospect of buying from a country like Borneo disturbing.

In Borneo, I went to Borneo a few years ago and they had clear fell 25% of all their forests to grow palms for palm oil. It was one of the most horrific things I have ever seen. We need it here to clear for farming, it's not a lot different but to do it in this day and age, it's a lot with the education we have. I would hate after discussing this, I would hate to see our forestry industry not continue [Forestry]

Profit for multinationals

Strong feedback was provided by participants around their distrust of the 'multinational' companies who ultimately will be the one to organise the clearing of forests in other countries. These companies are seen as being profit driven at the expense of the environment.

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You don't want a big multinational corporation raping a third world country to sell their wood to us at marked up prices, that's what you don't want [Forestry]

Poor ideology

Participants, even those who were outspoken about the native forestry industry could not understand why Australia would want to import wood from poorer countries. The concept did not sit well with their ideology. One participant assumed this practice could only lead to corruption at some level.

I think there is going to be corruption involved, it just sounds really off to me. Why would you take it from a poorer country and how much are you charging them for it. Are you taking it because it's cheaper, does that mean that the wood is quality. I don't like it; I think it's corruption [North Coast]

Self sufficiency

The majority, if not all participants, prefer Australia to be self-sufficient for an industry which is perceived as being one where Australia can provide for itself. There is a strong anti-dependent attitude for industries to remain in Australia where Australia has the capacity to provide the product(s).

We don't have to import wood; we can loosen those restrictions. Why do we have those restrictions, why can't we be self-sufficient. I know that there is a whole worldwide system in place but why can't we be self-sufficient, why do we need to get it from poorer countries just because it's cheaper. We're not doing ourselves any favours [North Coast]

In my opinion, is that if they import it from overseas, if you look at the big picture, not just NSW, but how do we know where that wood came from. You hear about what's happening in the Amazon with clear felling and all of that kind of thing. My opinion is not having our own wood could be disastrous. Looking at a global picture and not just NSW picture [Forestry]

This sentiment can also be true when it comes to even relying on the states within Australia.

In a fairy tale world, I'd like to say that people might be buying second hand furniture more than brand new stuff, but that is not the society we live in today, so that is not feasible. I would like to think that might happen. If we don't do any forestry then we might be heavily reliant on other states. You never know maybe they manage their forest different and better than what NSW does [North Coast]

6.1.3 Impact of closure

Participants were asked to consider what some of the possible ramifications could be if the native forestry industry was no longer allowed to occur in public native forests. The responses were as follows:

The future of hardwood harvesting

More plastic

There is a concern that if hardwood was difficult to buy and Australia was reliant on importing hardwood, then alternatives such as plastic would be used/created to fill the void. Participants do not like the concept of plastic and felt quite strongly it should be avoided. Timber is seen as a 'natural' product and therefore preferable over plastic. Plastic does not break down, contributes to landfill, and overall, far worse for the environment than native forestry and its practices.

There would be a lot of plastic, that's for sure. It is organic, taking down trees does harm because they supply our oxygen but at the same time it's more of an organic product that we can have that we can try to put somewhere else. Plastic stuff it is just going to sit there for ages where the wood breaks down [North Coast]

Animals could become extinct

Participants do not want to be contributing to the extinction of animals in overseas countries. The demise of forests in countries such as Burma and Malaysia is distressing to participants.

That's what is happening in the Amazon. I get about the Orangutans; I thought it was Burma more than Malaysia. I'm not happy that Orangutans are going to go extinct [North Coast]

Inferior wood

Some participants use hardwood on their properties. They are aware of the robust nature of this wood and use it for specific purposes. These participants do not want to be using wood that is of an inferior quality.

And it lasts longer as well. Wood, especially having horses, whenever you're getting your posts ready, it's always recommended that you take from your own farm because they're acclimatised to your area. When you're bringing it in from another area you don't know what condition that the trees have been in and that affects your work quality. Even if it's a softwood and you cut it and it's grown on your property it is going to last longer than if you bought it from somewhere else [Forestry]

Cost of housing will increase

Each focus group started by asking people what are the issues that most affect them. Participants in each group stated the cost of living and many focussed on housing as key problems for them. There is concern that if hardwood is to be scarce and have to be imported, then it will also drive up the price of the wood. This will in turn continue to raise the price of housing or any place hardwood is used.

I think it would drive up the cost of a lot of other elements. If you're not having wood frames when you're building your houses and you'd have to switch to steel, that is going to drive up the cost of that as well [Lower Hunter]

The future of hardwood harvesting

When you think about it, this whole forestry, logging and all of that, if we didn't have that then the cost of furniture and everything timber, there is so much, that's in-house building, everything would go up, because there would be a shortage of it, and you would have to import it so you would have to get it to come over on boats and all of that. That does affect all of that indirectly [Forestry]

I think the cost of living would make it even worse. The old Australian dream of building your house would certainly be a thing of the past [Lower Hunter]

Jobs will be lost

Job loss is a sensitive issue. Participants in all groups discussed feeling pressured by increased costs of living. Job redundancies and losses makes people feel nervous for the simple reason they would not like it to happen to them. Participants are concerned there would be significant job losses if native forestry were to close down not just for those directly employed within the industry but those that support the industry as well.

There are plenty of people that require jobs, there are plenty of people that can live within that industry [Lower Hunter]

And jobs, it keeps people employed. Even though the sawmills in the area, they are nowhere near as big as they used to be because so many people are against your clearing and your logging, but they do create local jobs and that's important [Forestry]

For me personally, you'd have thousands of people unemployed, you did it overnight that would be one implication [Greenbelt]

...you'd have a lot of people without a job, you'd have a lot of people without jobs actually not just the forestry people. Transport, distributions, supply all that shifts immediately and you'd probably pay a lot more and you would probably stop asking those questions. I don't care where it comes from I just need timber I'm going to build this thing [Greenbelt]

Forest mismanagement

There is concern that a forest that is not worked and managed properly will become a hazard to those who live nearby. Some participants feel the forests will become too congested, a fire haven due to the heavy undergrowth and density of the trees. The destructive ability of a fire is a constant hazard in rural areas near forests and participants believe that in the absence of care the possibility of fires will increase.

Downside, overgrowth. I live in some areas where it is so dense in places and the trees are so close together that a person cannot even walk through it. That's not safe, especially when you have to think about all the flooding and the fires, you need to be able to evacuate appropriately [Forestry]

I was going to say I think we're in more danger if we don't if it shuts down no one is managing them I think that puts especially rural populations in more danger. Fires and not looking after it and I just think it needs to be managed and looked after [Tablelands]

The future of hardwood harvesting

Concern about hardwood alternatives

If access to hardwood is limited due to native forestry being forced to close, some participants are concerned the alternatives that will be sourced would be more damaging than forestry. Participants discuss how forestry has the advantage that there is the capacity to re-grow trees whereas the alternatives often are a finite resource that cannot be replenished.

What are we going to use as alternatives, the same as the coal fire and then we go to gas and then gas has got its problems like I'm not sure by taking one out we need to replace it with something is that more environmentally unfriendly than what we already got or is it better. There is a consequence of shutting things down without replacing [Tablelands]

Positive implication - logging should not be in State forests

One participant feels logging should not take place in State forests. This participant does not believe the 'State forest Forestry' is run well. Their position is hardwood can be planted and logged, but not in the State forest.

I don't know what that means in terms of, I feel like that timber is sustainable in the sense that yes you plant it, for all the purposes of logging it, plant it for purposes and you manage it for that purpose then that to me is fine because I think timber is great and has great uses. Forestry in terms of what we do in the State forest I don't think is that great. If shutting down forestry means shutting down the State forest Forestry then I think that would be good because I don't think they're doing a good job of it [North Coast]

Positive implication - alternatives will be found

One participant took the positive approach of suggesting that if the industry were to close down, then alternative industries could be found that are less damaging to the environment. If this was to happen then the jobs lost could be replaced.

It is, that's what I'm saying. It could open up that avenue if one shuts down. Like they say one door closes, two doors open. Maybe perhaps something that is less damaging to the environment could be planted and utilised. There's that 10,000 jobs we were talking about [North Coast]

6.1.4 Additional feedback

The conclusion each focus group came to was native forestry is important to NSW and should continue. According to participants, there is no interest in NSW impacting on the forests of other countries when hardwood can be produced in NSW. They expect high standards of the industry, but their belief that NSW is capable of producing this product and discussed a range of reasons why it is feasible for it to continue.

The future of hardwood harvesting

The reasons are:

Ownership of Australia's issues

The concept of exploiting poorer countries and their natural resources is not a comfortable concept for many participants. These participants, even though some do not like the concept of forestry, concede that it is better to control our own forests as ethically as it can be, rather than exploit the forests of other countries. In their opinions, Australia needs hardwood and therefore should manage their needs, not turn to other countries and accept wood from countries that may engage in poor forestry practices.

I feel like if we don't do some of the lifting then we're just destroying someone else's part, it seems quite regulated and from that map you showed us earlier with it only being 12%, I guess that is great, excuse my ignorance, if it's over in PNG and they're doing 80% well that's horrible. Control the measures that are in place currently from my limited knowledge is okay with me [Newcastle]

Mixed because it's still taking trees away from other countries instead of our own [Lower Hunter]

..our issue to other countries, causing the same issues for them that we're worried about but we can turn a blind eye because it is in another country [Sydney]

You've just hit the nail on the head that is essentially what I would think it comes down to, I agree with you we do it properly. You would like to think that we've got the sense to do it properly [Tablelands]

Support local businesses

Many participants prefer to buy products that are Australian made. Some like to support the local businesses and believe that the more businesses that can be supported locally, the more that will be able to continue trading. Some see buying local as their responsibility to support local businesses.

There is something about buying locally as well. As a small business owner in this area, we support small business locally and try and buy things, not only Australian made but locally made, we buy local honey, support local farmers [Forestry]

NSW can produce timber

There is a perception among many participants that North East NSW has the ability to produce hardwood. There is enough land for this to occur sustainably and the concept of importing wood is not appealing.

We've got a lot of land; it doesn't seem like a great idea to be importing wood which is just being cut down somewhere else. We should be able to sustain an industry for that with the land that we have [North Coast]

The future of hardwood harvesting

Autonomy for Australia is important

There is a feeling among many participants that being independent and self-reliant is important. COVID-19 and the restrictions that went with it has had the impact of making some participants believe it is important for Australia to be as self-sufficient as it can be. Relying on countries for a product that can be produced in NSW does not seem a sensible or sustainable plan to these participants.

If we have our own forestry we have control of our own destiny. We're importing, we don't know what it is, we don't know where it has come from, we're losing jobs. At least if we do have them here it's all of our own and our own jobs and our own responsibility is what I'm thinking [Newcastle]

The future of hardwood harvesting

6.2 Quantitative findings

6.2.1 Quantitative overview and conclusion

As an addition to the questions about social licence to operate two questions were asked:

- *Having completed this survey and considered native hardwood forestry, do you believe having a native forest timber industry is important in NSW?*
- *Do you believe the NSW native forest timber industry should be closed?*

These were included so that there was a clear outcome that was not a rating but a question where research participants could only answer 'yes', 'no' or 'don't know'. This is important to the decision that the State must make about continued operations of the native forest harvesting industry.

Both these questions were asked at the end of the questionnaire so that research participants had considered the industry, knew the amount of area where native timber harvesting is carried out and read both the concerns and benefits of the industry.

The majority of residents of Greater Sydney and the North East Region believe that native forest harvesting is a legitimate industry and should not be closed. However, the number of people who would like to see the industry closed is too high. Seventeen percent (17%) who would like to see the industry closed (14% in the North East Region) is a large number of people who can be vocal in their beliefs. Additionally, the nineteen percent (19%) who 'don't know' if the industry should be closed are a potential additional threat to ongoing native forestry harvesting. The level of support for the ongoing operation should not be taken for granted.

The native forest harvesting industry needs to inform all stakeholders of the benefits of continued operation.

6.2.2 Is native forest harvesting an important industry

Table 6: Q27 Is native forest harvesting an important industry for NSW Base: 2,200

	%
Yes	69
No	12
Don't know	19

Base: all research participants (weighted)

Question: *'Having completed this survey and considered native hardwood forestry, do you believe having a native forest timber industry is important in NSW?'*

The future of hardwood harvesting

The findings show that over two-thirds (69%) of NSW residents of the regions included in the survey believe that native forest harvesting is an important industry in NSW.

Table 7: Q27 Is native forest harvesting an important industry for NSW **Base: 2,200**

	NET	Greater Sydney	North East Region
Yes	69	68	72
No	12	12	12
Don't know	19	20	15

Base: all research participants (weighted)

Analysis by broad area shows that almost three-quarters of residents in the North East region (72%) believe that forest harvesting is an important industry. This is lower for residents of Greater Sydney, where just over two-thirds of residents (68%) believe it is an important industry. Residents of the Mid-North Coast are more likely (77%) to believe it is an important industry for NSW.

6.2.3 Should native forest harvesting be closed

Table 8: Q28 Should the native forest harvesting industry be closed **Base: 2,200**

	%
Yes	17
No	59
Don't know	24

Base: all research participants (weighted)

Question: *'Do you believe the NSW native forest timber industry should be closed?'*

Over half (59%) say that native harvesting should not be closed. Just under one-quarter (24%) 'don't know' if the industry should be closed and seventeen percent (17%) believe the industry should be closed.

Table 9: Q28 Should the native forest harvesting industry be closed **Base: 2,200**

	NET	Greater Sydney	North East Region
Yes	17	17	14
No	59	57	68
Don't know	24	26	18

Base: all research participants (weighted)

The future of hardwood harvesting

Analysis by broad area shows that belief the industry should be closed is slightly higher in Greater Sydney (17%) than the North East Region (14%).

The only region with a statistically significant difference is Newcastle where eleven percent (11%) believe the industry should be closed.

Table 10: Q28 Should the native forest harvesting industry be closed

Base: 899

Column %	NET	City, Inner West & Eastern Sydney	North West Sydney	Northern Sydney	Western Sydney	Southern Sydney
Yes	17	13	21	18	19	11
No	58	50	60	63	53	64
Don't know	26	36	20	18	27	25

Base: Sydney metropolitan residents (unweighted)

Analysis by Sydney metropolitan areas shows that residents of Southern Sydney are lower (11%) than the average (17%).

Residents of the City, Inner West and Eastern Sydney are more likely to state they 'don't know' (36%) if the native forest harvesting industry should be closed and less likely to believe the industry should remain operating (50%).

7 Attitude statements

7.1 Attitude statement conclusion

There is overall support for ongoing native forest harvesting and lower support for eliminating the use of hardwood in homes and buildings and very little support for imported overseas hardwood. Without a successful Australian native forest harvesting industry importing hardwood from overseas is the only alternative.

A key finding is there is a lack of awareness of native hardwood harvesting. This is an issue for the industry as there cannot be informed support or even informed non-support of the industry.

The economic benefits of native hardwood harvesting are clear with the highest agreement for the importance to rural economies.

There is a high 'don't know' response for many statements participants were asked to consider. This suggests there are many people whose lack of awareness will contribute to a lower social licence to operate position. It strongly suggests the native hardwood harvesting industry needs improved communications to tell its positive story.

The native forestry industry needs to consider the results from Greater Sydney. The agreement with the negative statements was more likely to come from Greater Sydney than the North East Region. It is important to have Greater Sydney support for the industry.

7.2 Attitude statement findings

Research participants were asked to rate seventeen (17) statements on a Likert scale of:

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know

Typically statements are all positive so that agreement is clear; however in this study we chose to avoid any suggestion of bias or leading answers and chose to make some statements positive and some negative about native forest harvesting. Statements were randomised so there was no ordinal bias.

Attitude statements

The statements are:

- We should ban the use of native hardwoods in Australian homes
- We should look for alternatives to native hardwood in our homes
- All native forests should be reserved from harvesting
- State forests in NSW are poorly managed
- Hardwood forestry in native State forests in NSW is destructive and should be banned
- Hardwood used in Australia should come from overseas forests
- I support the ongoing harvesting in native forests in NSW
- I have very little knowledge about native forestry and timber harvesting in NSW
- First Nations should be involved in the management of native forests in NSW
- Selective harvesting only uses a small area of NSW native forests
- Hardwood timber harvesting meets strict environmental requirements
- Timber harvesting contributes to the management of State forests
- Australia should not import native hardwood from overseas and use its own hardwood
- Hardwood timber harvesting is important for rural economies
- All State forests in NSW are in poor health
- Some of our public native forests should remain available for producing hardwood timber
- Houses should be built out of steel and cement and not wood

Table 11: Q25 Native hardwood forest statements

Base: 2,200

Row %	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Hardwood timber harvesting is important for rural economies	12	58	11	2	16
I have very little knowledge about native forestry and timber harvesting in NSW	18	55	18	3	6
Australia should not import native hardwood from overseas and use its own hardwood	16	49	16	3	15
Some of our public native forests should remain available for producing hardwood timber	10	56	13	4	17
Selective harvesting only uses a small area of NSW native forests	10	55	12	3	20

Attitude statements

Row %	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Timber harvesting contributes to the management of State forests	8	55	13	3	21
First Nations should be involved in the management of native forests in NSW	19	39	16	10	16
We should look for alternatives to native hardwood in our homes	11	48	19	4	18
Hardwood timber harvesting meets strict environmental requirements	7	45	14	4	30
I support the ongoing harvesting in native forests in NSW	8	43	20	6	22
Houses should be built out of steel and cement and not wood	8	30	35	8	19
All native forests should be reserved from harvesting	9	29	36	8	18
Hardwood forestry in native State forests in NSW is destructive and should be banned	8	24	37	10	21
State forests in NSW are poorly managed	6	24	31	5	34
We should ban the use of native hardwoods in Australian homes	6	19	41	14	19
All State forests in NSW are in poor health	5	19	38	8	31
Hardwood used in Australia should come from overseas forests	4	15	42	23	16

Base: all research participants (weighted)

In reading this table it is important to understand that this uses 'row percents' so that each row adds to one hundred percent (100%).

Before considering agreement and disagreement we should first consider the statements with above average responses for 'don't know'.

'Hardwood timber harvesting meets strict environmental requirements' has a 'don't know' response of thirty percent (30%). This shows that many are not clear about the environmental requirements of native hardwood harvesting.

Attitude statements

As found in the qualitative research the industry has very high levels of compliance that are unknown to most people. This is an aspect of the industry that should be more widely known.

‘State forests in NSW are poorly managed’ has an above average ‘don’t know’ response of thirty-one percent (31%). It is unrealistic for most people to understand the management process for State forests and the qualitative research found that this is a criticism from those who oppose native forest harvesting. If State forests are well managed this is again an area that should be communicated to residents.

‘All State forests in NSW are in poor health’ is also a statement with above average ‘don’t know’ response of thirty one percent (31%). This is similar to the previous statement and again difficult for those not involved in the industry to understand. If State forests are in good health this is an area for communication.

To make this data easier to understand we have combined ‘strongly agree’ and ‘agree’ to a total for ‘agree’ and the same approach for ‘disagree’ and ‘strongly disagree’.

Table 12: Q25 Native hardwood forest statements

Base: 2,200

Row %	Total agree	Total disagree	Don't know
I have very little knowledge about native forestry and timber harvesting in NSW	73	21	6
Hardwood timber harvesting is important for rural economies	70	14	16
Some of our public native forests should remain available for producing hardwood timber	67	17	17
Australia should not import native hardwood from overseas and use its own hardwood	66	19	15
Selective harvesting only uses a small area of NSW native forests	64	16	20
Timber harvesting contributes to the management of State forests	62	16	21
We should look for alternatives to native hardwood in our homes	59	23	18
First Nations should be involved in the management of native forests in NSW	58	26	16
Hardwood timber harvesting meets strict environmental requirements	52	18	30
I support the ongoing harvesting in native forests in NSW	51	27	22
Houses should be built out of steel and cement and not wood	38	42	19
All native forests should be reserved from harvesting	38	45	18

Attitude statements

Row %	Total agree	Total disagree	Don't know
Hardwood forestry in native State forests in NSW is destructive and should be banned	32	47	21
State forests in NSW are poorly managed	30	36	34
We should ban the use of native hardwoods in Australian homes	25	55	19
All state forests in NSW are in poor health	23	46	31
Hardwood used in Australia should come from overseas forests	19	65	16

Base: all research participants (weighted)

In this simplified analysis there is more clarity in the level of agreement with statements.

Perhaps the most important for understanding how residents of Greater Sydney and the North East Region feel is that the highest agreement is for having 'little knowledge of native forestry and timber harvesting in NSW' (73%). If the industry is to remain viable in the public space this level of knowledge should be improved.

Most statement agreement is generally positive towards native forest harvesting. The importance of the industry to the rural economy is recognised (70%), there is support that Australia should not import hardwood and use local timber (66%), that some areas of public native forests should remain open for harvesting (67%), selective hardwood only uses a small area of NSW native forests (64%) and that there are strict environmental requirements for harvesting (52%).

However many also agree that we should look for an alternative to hardwood in our homes (59%) and support for ongoing hardwood harvesting is only fifty-one percent (51%).

There is lower agreement that houses should not be built with wood (38%), all State forests should be reserved from harvesting (38%), 'hardwood forestry in State forests should be banned' (32%), State forests are poorly managed (30%), use of native timber in homes 'should be banned' (25%), State forests are in 'poor health' (23%).

Few agree that our hardwood timber should be sourced from overseas (19%).

Some of the statement agreement seems contradictory but it is important to understand that statements were presented randomly so responses are not necessarily thought through as a whole.

Attitude statements

Table 13: Q25 Native hardwood forest statements (index)

Base: 2,200

	Index
Hardwood timber harvesting is important for rural economies	64.6
I have very little knowledge about native forestry and timber harvesting in NSW	64.2
Australia should not import native hardwood from overseas and use its own hardwood	64.0
Selective harvesting only uses a small area of NSW native forests	62.3
Some of our public native forests should remain available for producing hardwood timber	62.0
Timber harvesting contributes to the management of State forests	61.3
We should look for alternatives to native hardwood in our homes	59.9
First Nations should be involved in the management of native forests in NSW	59.7
Hardwood timber harvesting meets strict environmental requirements	59.3
I support the ongoing harvesting in native forests in NSW	55.6
Houses should be built out of steel and cement and not wood	48.9
State forests in NSW are poorly managed	48.6
All native forests should be reserved from harvesting	48.3
Hardwood forestry in native State forests in NSW is destructive and should be banned	45.9
All State forests in NSW are in poor health	42.8
We should ban the use of native hardwoods in Australian homes	40.2
Hardwood used in Australia should come from overseas forests	32.7

Base: all research participants (weighted)

To allow comparison between groups the rating has been converted to an index. This is score from 0 to 100. In this analysis 'don't know' responses are not included as they cannot be assigned a value.

Table 14: Q25 Native hardwood forest statements (index)

Base: 2,200

	Greater Sydney	North East Region
Hardwood timber harvesting is important for rural economies	64.3	65.6
I have very little knowledge about native forestry and timber harvesting in NSW	65.7	58.4
Australia should not import native hardwood from overseas and use its own hardwood	63.4	66.4

Attitude statements

	Greater Sydney	North East Region
Selective harvesting only uses a small area of NSW native forests	62.0	63.4
Some of our public native forests should remain available for producing hardwood timber	62.0	62.2
Timber harvesting contributes to the management of State forests	61.1	62.0
We should look for alternatives to native hardwood in our homes	60.5	57.8
First Nations should be involved in the management of native forests in NSW	59.8	59.0
Hardwood timber harvesting meets strict environmental requirements	59.0	60.9
I support the ongoing harvesting in native forests in NSW	55.7	55.1
Houses should be built out of steel and cement and not wood	49.4	47.1
State forests in NSW are poorly managed	49.2	46.2
All native forests should be reserved from harvesting	49.6	43.5
Hardwood forestry in native State forests in NSW is destructive and should be banned	46.9	42.3
All State forests in NSW are in poor health	44.1	38.2
We should ban the use of native hardwoods in Australian homes	41.5	35.7
Hardwood used in Australia should come from overseas forests	34.7	25.3

Base: all research participants (weighted)

In the above analysis Net (or total) is not shown for clarity of the data.

The findings show that Greater Sydney residents are more likely to agree they have little knowledge about native forestry harvesting in NSW (65.7) compared to residents of the North East Region (58.4).

There is higher agreement by residents of the North East Region that Australia should not import hardwood from overseas (66.4) than Greater Sydney residents (63.4).

When analysed by region there is overall higher agreement by residents of Greater Sydney in statements that are negative about native forest harvesting. This includes higher agreement that hardwood used in Australia should come from overseas forests.

Residents of the North East Region are more supportive of native hardwood harvesting in general and less supportive of negative statements about the industry.

Forest and timber harvesting

8 Forest and timber harvesting

8.1 Native forestry (hardwood)

8.1.1 Qualitative summary

Participants were next asked to consider what 'forestry' meant to them.

Participants who accept forestry see it as a sustainable industry that benefits society. Participants who do not accept forestry see it as destructive, overused and controlled by government and private enterprises. The remaining participants who are unsure about the industry accept it is important but would like reassurances it operates ethically, efficiently and animals are protected.

Wood is a resource that nearly all participants use and there is a genuine liking of having wood in their immediate environments. Reassurance that animals are protected and disruption of their habitats is not devastating, forest usage is not extensive (even minimal) and processes are enforced is important information participants are seeking.

8.1.2 Attitudes towards forestry

Participants who are positive about forestry raised the following points:

- Wood is a resource that has multiple purposes and uses. People use wood in a variety of ways. It is flexible multipurposed commodity
- Wood is needed for housing and there is currently a housing shortage
- Is a cyclical process: Trees are grown, cut down and grown again
- It is Industry that attracts people who care about forests. Those who work in the forests will care about its health and its ongoing sustainability
- Biggest threat to forests is fires. All groups talked about the 2019/2020 fires, their intensity and the damage the left behind. The first are mostly not attributable to the forestry industry
- Urbanisation is mistaken for forestry. Participants talked about land being cleared, but it was in the context of urban development, not forestry
- Participants who do not see any evidence of harvesting are not forming a strong emotional attachment or relationship with the trees. They know it occurs but 'out of sight, out of mind' attitude dominates their thoughts on forestry
- Forestry is simply looking after the forest. It is no more complicated than making sure the forests are healthy
- It is not an industry that happens in the local area, therefore it has no impact. Participants in some areas had no real opinion about forestry as their area does not have a large forestry industry

Forest and timber harvesting

- Some participants commented on there now being less 'logging' than there used to be. Others believe that it is an industry that is well regulated

Participants who have negative beliefs about the industry raised the following points:

- Forestry is ruthless and corrupt. Money is more important than looking after the forests properly. Government and businesses are the major beneficiaries and they will do whatever it takes to make money
- There is significant wastage in the harvesting process. Wood is left on the ground and is wasted which is a problem because it could be used for other purposes
- Old growth trees are 'chopped down' when they should not be. Foresters do not consider the significance of the tree they are chopping down. There is a lack of respect for old growth forests
- The NSW forests are over-logged. Too many trees have been taken down and this has had an impact on the forests
- Land clearing in NSW is similar to Brazil
- Timber is sold overseas and this further depletes the supplies available
- The forests should be replanted with more variety. More consideration should be given to what types of trees are planted

Participants who are uncertain about the industry raised these points:

- Forestry is necessary, but it needs to be sustainable. The word 'sustainable' is not well defined, but the sentiment is that the industry can be continuous and takes into consideration the environment where harvesting takes place
- Wood is precious and it should be respected, not wasted. Participants have observed that wood is often wasted, for example when a house or building is taken down. They would like to see more recycling of timber and want reassurance that no part of a logged tree is wasted
- Forestry is a 'necessary evil'. Wood is needed and used for many purposes. Some people might not like the reality of taking trees from a forest, but recognise that like abattoirs, things happen that do not always sit well with a level of conscious and contemporary morality
- There is recognition it is easy to have an emotional reaction to seeing trees cut down. It is confronting and some participants recognise this as an overreaction to a necessary process
- 'Selective logging' is an acceptable way to harvest trees in a forest. Some participants appreciated the discussion around this topic. It reassured them that the harvesting of trees is not clear felling
- Uncertainty around who manages forestry. Who makes the decisions and how are the decisions made. Knowing who is responsible and if there is a plan would provide more credibility to the industry for some participants

Forest and timber harvesting

Positive comments

For me it's about a renewable industry. The idea is to have purpose of forestry, we utilise that resource, but we also focus on that revitalisation. We make sure that whatever we take we give back to the earth. It's just that circle of life. Natural resources
[Lower Hunter]

There doesn't seem to be a fair balance between knocking down and regrowth. At the moment there seems to be a heavy focus around urbanisation, this area and I'm sure the whole group here would understand. From Maitland through to Singleton at the moment it is riddled, absolutely riddled with new housing estates

[Lower Hunter]

I'd assume there would be a lot of people that would well respect them and care about it and try to plant trees whenever they dig up trees, so they always have stuff going. I'd assume there would still be people caring about the trees [Sydney]

As long as it is done ethically, I think most of our local companies are, they have different farms and they get harvested every ten years, is what they are, the hardwood farms are in our area. I'm not quite sure what it is beyond that. I like to see, it's nice to see the process, seeing them planting all these saplings, and it's not just taking [Forestry]

I don't think they're cutting down too many, I just think that we're going to consistently have bushfires and that's going to take the trees, if they don't protect that with the backburning when they can as you say but if you're going to have bushfire in two or three years well then you can lose trees anyway
[Tablelands]

For me it's planted wood for logging, that pops to my mind straightway, logging for household use [North Coast]

I don't think forestry is cutting down too many trees but those of you in Tamworth are you familiar with the Forest Hills area and the new development going up on the top side of Forest Hills and how they just logged all of that to put the new subdivision in... But forestry in my understanding and just my tripping around they replant them it's just a revolving door [Tablelands]

Well Primary Industry is about extracting value from the land which often means land clearing and using it for crops and those sorts of purposes. Whereas forestry is more I would think sorry the national forestry should be more about conservation of natural land. I think we need to strike a balance obviously we need land for agriculture but we also need forests [Sydney]

Forest and timber harvesting

Positive comments

Selective logging is where they come through and mark specific trees that they think would be good for them and when they do selective logging they have to look at it and they have to look up a tree and if there's a koala habitat there or a hole big enough for a parrots nest then they are not allowed to cut that down, that's selective logging where they go through and it keeps biodiversity and all the mosses stay growing and things like that. When they clear fell you're making extinct some sort of frog or mosses that the other little animals feed on so then the chain doesn't go through [Forestry]

There are these beautiful trees, they are doing nothing but good and they've just been ripped down for the sake of concrete going through. Obviously, these sorts of things occur in a State forest, we don't see it, so it is hard to draw that emotional attachment to it as well. Yes, there are products that we need, they take them from places that we don't see the trees getting pulled down because then you don't have people who have emotional attachments to them [Newcastle]

It's not something I've ever thought about. I will say there is a definite housing shortage for people, in this area people are absolutely suffering for not having homes. Families are having to go on Facebook and try and have hope and they just don't and there are people sleeping in their cars, it is just really sad. We need more homes for those people [Lower Hunter]

Back in the day that's where they used to do a lot of the processing for the lumber. I think it's all decommissioned now [Lower Hunter]
It's not perfect at all but to commercially sell it it's relatively regulated [Tablelands]

Forest and timber harvesting

Negative comments

I don't have any idea and I'd say mostly the general public doesn't but given that State Governments and Federal Governments pretty much like to do whatever they want and they're pretty good in aligning with the building industries like the number one employer in Australia we are going to let the commercial companies pretty much do whatever they want [Sydney]

Yes, the corruption. If the government is transparent, ha, ha, they never will be, but anyway we can dream. Fully transparent. Sometimes they find Aboriginal artefacts, but they seem to bulldoze over that, bury it up, things like that piss me off. That has to be fully looked into.... from what I've seen, the little bit I've seen on YouTube, it happens a lot. They don't care if it's a very old tree that's been in Australia for over 250 years where it's scientifically been dated, no we're just chopping that one down. That's heartbreaking [North Coast]

It's like the people have got to go to work, they've got to earn their money, so a lot of their morals and ethics get pushed aside just for the money [North Coast]

To answer your question, they log a hell of a lot and people just don't unless you live in that town, you wouldn't have a clue. You have no idea [North Coast]

I would like to know where it goes and what it is used for, how often is it being exported. Are we getting a good price, Australia is full of wonderful resources, best in the world for a lot of things. I think a lot of the exports that we do ship overseas I think they're severely under-priced and no doubt it's the same with this industry [North Coast]

A whole lot more than I thought. I did hear a stat about the amount of land clearing that we do is on par with Brazil, in terms of how much they clear in the Amazon as well. Some of that is for housing and some of it is for plantation and some of it might be old growth. It seems like there is a whole heap of it but also they talk about a timber shortage [North Coast]

But they shouldn't be going and killing the old growth forest that should be stop right there because that's something absolutely vital [Greenbelt]

I understand they plant, yes it is necessary we do need wood. But let's get more than just two species going [Greenbelt]

Forestry is most closely associated with the felling of timber, the production of timber for industrial purposes. When people talk about the forestry industry they talk about companies that log either plantation wood or native forests [Sydney]

A necessary evil, manage better and maybe they don't need to use so much because we're exporting some of it. I'd like it just to be for us, self-relying on us. They do replant and that's only for their pockets later on. The state makes a lot of money from it too [North Coast]

Forest and timber harvesting

Uncertain

I'm all for development but to a certain point, there has to be a point where we go enough is enough, we've got to start looking after trees and vegetation. We need trees, we need vegetation, if we want to breathe we need trees [Lower Hunter]

One of my daughters lives in Tasmania and we went for a drive up into the mountains, it was just amazing, then again you have a logging truck pass you and I cringed. We couldn't survive without wood. I don't have an answer to that, that's my feeling on it [Forestry]

I think selective logging is a positive thing because biodiversity gets to stay, if they are selective logging in the true sense and not to clear felling it. I think clear fell is a very negative thing and I think creating a forest with eucalyptus and if that's what it's going to be designed for and they leave it there 30, 40, 50 years or something like that for logs to get big enough but then still selectively log that so the animals that have inhabited still have a chance to survive. Totally against clear fell [Forestry]

A necessary evil. While we still need houses, houses still being built with wood, they're not always going to be built with steel. I guess it is trying to find that balance and it is not being mismanaged. It is great if trees that are getting knocked down and there is revitalisation so there is not much impact on flora and fauna, for me I think that's a good thing. If it's full blown willy-nilly, and it's mismanaged to the stage where it's completely disrupting and disturbing and knocking out native species perhaps that is pushing the envelope a bit too far. Trying to find that fine balance between harvesting with purpose, just being mindful of the environment [Lower Hunter]

I'm in two minds about it. The same as eating meat, exactly the same to me. It's a necessary evil. We can't survive without wood and getting new wood and all of that. There has to be a medium. These old growth forests can't be destroyed. You go up to Dorrigo and driving from Bellingen to Dorrigo and you have logging trucks coming the other way and you just look at the size of the logs, oh my god that must have been there for thousands of years before they cut that down. It's a necessary evil but there has got to be a better alternative than that in my opinion [Forestry]

I don't know if it was a park where it's happened or it was farmland where they are logging trees, but it is a bit confronting or haunting to see half a forest cut down. Thinking about it now there has to be some sustainability to it otherwise the trees wouldn't grow back or there would be no trees left. I don't know if it's a great, it's very sustainable or what the costs are on the environment to continually grow and cut down trees [Newcastle]

Forest and timber harvesting

8.2 Pine forests

Some participants did distinguish between a pine forest and a native forest. Pine forests do not attract the same degree of scrutiny from participants. There are aspects of pine forest harvesting that are far more acceptable to people than a native forest.

The distinction seems to be based on two aspects; one is it is a planted forest as the comment below indicates but while no participants articulated this thought, it could also be due to the perceived lack of wildlife that are part of pine forests.

I guess in a strange way I'm not saying this is right or wrong but in my mind when I go past say a pine plantation I think to myself, this is part of the industry. When I think about a eucalyptus growth forest I don't think, I hope they're going to chop these trees and make something out of them, you know what I mean. I want to enjoy it as nature, that's where my mind goes when I just see these visuals I sort of think that the pine is more permissible to cut down because it's been planted with that in mind [Sydney]

Community concerns

9 Community concerns

9.1 Qualitative community concerns

9.1.1 Summary

Living environments differ, but it is important to participants to enjoy their living space and their broader environment. Focus group participants discussed the importance of where a person lives because it provides safety and security and connects them to the local community. Ideally it suits the needs of the individual. Participants mostly enjoy all aspects of where they have chosen to live, which is not to say that there are no annoying aspects they need to contend with.

The biggest issues for participants and where they live focussed on the cost of living, housing, rent and goods, as well as access to services.

No participant spontaneously suggested native forestry was an issue for them in these initial discussions in the focus groups.

9.1.2 Positive aspects

Participants were asked to think about the aspects of their area where they live that they like, and those that they do not like.

Aspects that participants like about their local area are:

Community	Facilities	Environment
Good area to live in	Easy access to local facilities or entertainment	Climate
Family friendly	Restaurants, pubs, cafés	Relaxed
Locals are friendly	Bike tracks	Close to bigger centres such as Newcastle
Simple lifestyle	Exciting events (Sydney)	Nature: trees and greenery
Local connections: sporting teams	Good hospitals (Sydney)	Bushwalking, 4WD and other outdoor recreational facilities
	Improved facilities due to more people relocating post COVID-19	Large blocks of land

Community concerns

Participants were able to identify many aspects of the areas where they live that they appreciate. The perfect balance is to have a strong community, facilities that are available and a pleasing environment.

Supporting quotes to illustrate these responses are:

- Benefits of living in their area:

I love living up here, it's great. The climate is fantastic, it's a very, very easy place to get around, people seem quite relaxed, travelling to work takes me 20 minutes whereas before I would have to go on 14 different pieces of public transport. We've got amazing beach fronts and the foreshore which is absolutely stunning. Almost everywhere you go takes you 5 to 10 minutes. If you want to step outside your backdoor and go further to the Watagan's or things like that, you're not travelling huge distances. Nelson Bay is an hour up the road, there are so many things on offer in a lot of ways. I play sport for a sporting club, my wife plays sport, my kids play sport, and we never have to travel too far for those sorts of things. I think that there's great restaurants, there's great pubs, it has got a lot going for it. It's an easy place to ride around as well. There is not much I can really fault it with in a lot of ways [Newcastle]

- Local community:

I live in Copmanhurst, which is just a little bit outside of Grafton. What I love about this area is how lovely the people are. What brought me here, I was actually driving up to the Gold Coast, this is before the new highway was done, my car broke down in the middle of Grafton, within five minutes of my car breaking down I had three different mechanics stop and asked to help before I even had a chance to contact the NRMA. I had people fixing my car, offering to help me, they ended up fixing my car and getting it running. I tried to give them money for the parts and labour, and they wouldn't take any of it, they were just happy that I was on my way [Forestry]

- Lismore appeal:

I live on the plateau above Lismore. I did have a house in Lismore and yes it is much hotter now I'm up high, it's called Goonellabah. What do I love about this place, it's very eclectic it's sort of a country atmosphere your neighbours talk with everyone. I have many Indigenous neighbours. I have other neighbours. I think too it was really good for my son. I considered home schooling but there were such good schools here. I have wonderful gardens so I grow a lot of my own food, that's what I like. It is very relaxed, arty its eclectic it's allowing [Greenbelt]

- Simple lifestyle:

What I like about it is one set of traffic lights in Glen Innes and it's only in school zone times. Normally not this week because we have got the kelpie festival but normally, if you want to go to the newsagent you park outside and if you want to go to Woolworths you park outside. And so those things are very good and also just knowing so many lovely people it's a great town, people are great [Tablelands]

Community concerns

- Positive environment to raise a family:

I'm at Tamworth. It's big enough and we get most things. We moved here for the kids basically and I wanted to get out of the city. So it's been pretty good, the school has been good, services I find them good enough for what I've got to do, there isn't any major sore points [Tablelands]

- Well located:

We have got the best of both worlds. Taree, even though it's not a city, it doesn't have the shops that Newcastle has or Sydney, we've still got pretty good shops. You can find anything that you need here. Port Macquarie is 50 minutes north, they've got even more shops there. Forster is 25 minutes away, there are heaps of shops there and Newcastle is two hours down the road. We're in the middle of everywhere [Forestry]

9.1.3 Local environment negatives

Participants were asked to consider the aspects were of their area where they lived that they did not like.

All participants like where they live and all agreed the good aspects outweigh the bad. All the same, many hold concerns for themselves and for others in the community. The recurring themes across all groups is urbanisation and the cost of living; renting, buying a house and the costs of goods and services.

Aspects participants do not like about their area are:

Urbanisation	Housing/cost of living	Other
Too much development	House prices too high	Lack of cultural diversity and conservative people
Loss of trees due to development	Rent has escalated and people are struggling to afford rent	COVID-19 forced many local businesses to close
High density housing	Limited places to rent	Younger generation lack respect
Traffic congestion	Cost of living has increased; food, building, goods	Entitled people
Lack of public transport		Negativity; population, news
Neighbourhood losing character		Discrimination
Poor infrastructure		Fake news

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Urbanisation	Housing/cost of living	Other
Lack of medical facilities		Staff shortages
		Homelessness

Supporting quotes to illustrate these responses are:

- Lack of cultural diversity:

I do miss the different food options in Sydney, just like different cultures, different cultural cuisines and different cultural activities in general. There's definitely still a lot going on up here but less than Sydney [Newcastle]

- Cost of housing:

I think a big one is housing, cost of housing, availability of housing and I think that is a hot topic right now also because the availability to housing is minimal and we're hoping to have a lot of immigration coming here to the country in the next 5 to 10 years, where is everyone going to go. That puts a squeeze on everybody else from both price, buying perspective and a renter's perspective so that affects everybody in the end [Sydney]

I've just helped my two kids buy a house each and the amount of price they paid for the houses is unbelievable compared to what I paid. They were bid out in quite a few different houses over the time of searching. When I bought a house there was none of that [Lower Hunter]

Because we also had the floods which wiped out our town, our town is still half non-functioning but I think after Covid the prices went up 200 grand on a house minimal. I'm lucky to own mine but that prices people out of the area and they have to go to Woop Woop [Green]

- Renting price increases:

We had to move, and it was very touch and go for a while. Just the cost of renting, how can they justify making you pay this much, that would be the biggest thing for me, would be the renting [Lower Hunter]

Old Bar. With Covid my house value over doubled overnight and all the rentals in my street that I know of, including my girlfriend across the road, they were all kicked out because everyone wanted to cash in and sell their houses. There is no rentals and rent has gone through the roof, I don't know how people can afford it in Old Bar now [Forestry]

- Lack of available renting options:

Even in the 3.5 years since I've been here I can really see a change, number one there are no rentals in Old Bar, and I rent. It's just absolutely ridiculous. One of the reasons isn't that there is not enough houses, it's that all the people either used to have holiday houses or had houses for rent here have now gone Airbnb. I had a friend who

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had three townhouses and got an offer she couldn't refuse, all three villas, they were going to someone who was going to Airbnb the whole three of them. I've noticed that that's for sure. The subdivisions that are going in here are insane with one road in and one road out [Forestry]

- **High density housing:**

What I don't like about what is happening to my suburb is that there is a push by those State and council to push high density housing. There have been thousands of apartments built over the past 5 years which is linked to the crowding of the roadways and whereas I used to live in a quiet street, my street is now a rat run to another suburb and there are queues of cars across my driveway every morning and every evening [Sydney]

We're limited in our space but because of the floods they really having to move people but that's contentious too. They are building but the things they're building are these sort of big monoliths, you know these sort of per five family we sort of need more terracing sort of Sydney type smaller homes I think [Greenbelt]

- **Medical services are poor:**

I've had my own run ins with disability, and I have travelled to Port Macquarie for specialist, I've travelled to Newcastle for specialist. We don't have a lot of big ones here, I don't mind doing that, it's not often that you have to do it. A few people have mentioned to me that they can't get in to see a doctor and they're having trouble finding someone that will bulk bill [North Coast]

- **Negativity within the community:**

There are a whole lot of things being thrown at us and people are taking it onboard so there's talks with war with China there's war in Ukraine there's a colony going down the gurgler, people are struggling with the cost of living. So there's a lot of angst and the younger ones in particularly just life being ruled by social media which half of it may not actually be true [Sydney]

- **Fake news:**

Everything that is wrapped up in fake news in the push to misinformation and even the media's role in that as well. Where has fact-based news gone that's the question I would like to ask [Sydney]

- **Homeless and crime:**

I live in Grafton, in the northern rivers. I love it, have been here 24 years. I was from Sydney, and it is beautiful. The downside is crime, mostly teenagers. I'm worried about the homeless, we're getting people living in tents here. I've never seen anything like that before [Forestry]

9.1.4 Key social issues

After considering the local issues that influence their daily lives, participants were asked to consider what are the biggest issues they feel have a broader influence on not just them, but those around them.

The biggest and most important issues for participants are:

- Social media
- Lack of public services - hospitals, health in general, public transport
- Supporting people with disabilities
- Social isolation
- Education
- Smaller town overpopulation

Social media

Many are concerned about the influence social media has on people of all age groups who use social media regularly. Their concerns are the spreading of 'fake news' and the influence it is having on children. It is mesmerising, dangerous and time consuming. Parents try to monitor what their children watch and limit exposure to unpleasant and/or negative content.

Social media is one of the biggest causes of concern with students, probably from year 3 up to year 12 and the issues they can create. That's probably something that I always am aware of. I've got two young children as well, an 8-year-old and a 6-year-old and we monitor what they do online but it's obviously one of these tricky things where you can't watch these things 24/7 and they hear it from their friends this is what we've seen and done. You wonder whether that's right or wrong, but I think that's something that is always going to be a port of concern in a lot of ways [Newcastle]

Lack of public services

Participants in North East NSW, perhaps to a lesser extent Newcastle participants, all commented on the lack of public services such as hospitals, doctors and public transport. The main focus was on medical accessibility. Participants in North East NSW discussed the lack of local doctors; it can take up to two weeks to see a doctor.

Participants in both Sydney and North East NSW discussed how hospitals are available, but do not always function well because of more demand than staff and beds available. For those who live in North East NSW, for any serious ongoing issues, those north of Newcastle either have to travel to Newcastle or Sydney. The main issue in all the conversations that took place in the focus group is the lack of availability of medical professionals. For example, a hospital has been built in Cessnock, however it is ineffective as they are missing a permanent doctor.

Where I live, in Cessnock, there is a lot of talk at the moment, we don't have a permanent doctor at our hospital. There is a lot of talk in the community about trying

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to get doctors to our hospital. A hospital without a doctor is not a good thing and that's what we have at the moment. If you go up to emergency a lot of the time they put you in a bed and they'll wheel a TV in and you're talking to a doctor on telehealth because there are no doctors at the hospital. That's a very big thing that's happening here in Cessnock at the moment [Lower Hunter]

I think we can all agree we've got a brand new hospital in Maitland which still doesn't have access to a level. According to state government they don't have enough staff [Lower Hunter]

Could I just pick on something xxx just said, it is also about the health system and access the hospitals. Our closest hospital is obviously St Vincent's hospital. Often when people get to emergency they could be there for hours it actually outstretches in the hallway up to two days before they get in the wards. To get an appointment in the out patients you could be waiting for like two or three months before you could even get an appointment these days. There is a massive pressure on the health system in NSW and especially in Sydney [Sydney]

Support for people with disabilities

In the focus groups there were people who identified with a disability and others who work in the support industry. All feel there is inadequate support or understanding given to those living with a disability. There is poor consultation, poor facilities and lack of genuine empathy. Those living with a disability often feel they are discriminated against. This is frustrating and limiting for them.

I'm very passionate about disability and accessibility. I've definitely found the same, it's really hard to find accessible places whether that's physical accessibility like wheelchair users and things like that but also places that accommodate for intellectual disabilities and neurodiversity, things like that. We've got students at school who are wheelchair users need toileting facilities and the excursion options are just so limited for them because places say they're accessible but they're not really. Similarly, to that as well in terms of disability just in terms of any initiatives or things for disability that I really strongly feel that they should be run by or at least in consultation with disabled people that's a really big issue for me [Newcastle]

I have autism and that is basically a disability and I'm basically a member of the minority and for the longest time also discriminated against because of that disability [Sydney]

Social isolation

COVID-19 has left many impacts on society. Social isolation for some is an issue at any given time, but COVID-19 made it particularly difficult for many. Those already feeling isolated, and/or those living in isolated environments, felt particularly vulnerable during the pandemic. The lack of interaction, the level of uncertainty and the risk of infection all played on their minds. Some still do not feel they have recovered.

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Isolation since Covid, I found the isolation very difficult. I was already fairly isolated in my life and that just made me more isolated and now I'm getting that way that it's hard for me to want to go out and meet people because I find it has affected me socially. A lot of people are finding they are more isolated than they were pre-Covid. I think it has changed a lot of people. I found it difficult [Forestry]

Education

Some parents discussed the education opportunities that are available for them in their local area. While many are happy with the choices available to them, some are concerned their children are being exposed to inferior education and are having to manage disturbing social issues. These parents are questioning the choices they have made.

Education, in our little life, I've got two children in high school and there has been a lot happening just at our particular school, not great things. That has been a topic of conversation a lot amongst my friends, did I pick the right school, what are my options, that kind of thing and just the time it takes to get things done. That would be a hot topic at the moment [North Coast]

Smaller town overpopulation

Participants in all North East NSW focus groups commented on the influx of people to their areas during COVID-19. Otherwise small towns with a stable population suddenly expanded as people either left the cities for a simpler lifestyle or because they could now work in a highly flexible way.

Housing costs and rents increased for most at an alarming rate, putting pressure on their ability in some cases to continue to live in the area where they had happily been living for years. Those that owned their homes felt relief and those who rent have to pay significantly more than they were before COVID-19.

The influx of people has had some profound effects on these participants. Among the issues it has created are rent increases, house increases, pressure on local builders to build houses, staff shortages, supply shortages as well as increased demand on local health services.

Participants like where they live, but the cost in the increase of living is affecting local communities in many ways. Hanging over the head of many participants is their fears for their children and their ability to buy into the property market in the future.

The housing in Tamworth at the moment is because of Covid is so inaccessible to anybody entering the market, it is unobtainable. Even my brother's on the Coast he's buying property up here because he's outpriced down there but he's got plenty of money for a regional centre and that's not fair [Tablelands]

Rentals in Glen Innes have just gone through the roof and the people that need to rent, and I'm one of them, its beyond us because of the changes. So many people that can now work from home who have left the city and bought in the country towns and the building is not keeping up with it [Forestry]

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Rent has gone through the roof in Port Macquarie. The population over the last couple of years has increased by about 30,000. One of the two fastest growing areas in NSW, Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour. Port Macquarie encompasses Wauchope. I've got a lot of people that live out in Wauchope, and they've had the same problem [North Coast]

There was a huge influx of people just buying houses without seeing them during Covid. We've had lots of building, housing developments going on and blocks selling out within half an hour. There was a whole new estate out at Old Bar, which is about 15 minutes from here on the beach, they opened up an estate and they all sold out within 15 minutes with the blocks of land being \$300k for a small block of land with no views, nowhere near the beach. Crazy things like that, happening still during Covid [North Coast]

Community concerns

9.2 Quantitative community concerns

9.2.1 Quantitative community concern conclusion

The communities' biggest concern is cost of living. This is a single issue that dominates responses.

Native forest harvesting is a low concern in broad community concerns and still low when included with specific concerns with 'trees and forests'.

Currently native forest harvesting is not a concern for the public.

9.2.2 General community concerns

Research participants were given a list of current community concerns that came from discussion in the qualitative stage of research. Included in this list is native forest harvesting.

Table 15: Q10 Current community concerns

Base: 2,200

	%
Cost of living in general	79
Cost of housing owning or renting	59
Interest rates	53
Climate change	47
Negativity in the world (media, social media, people in general)	39
Lack of public services (hospitals, health, public transport)	38
Aged care	34
Fake news	32
Overpopulation	30
Overdevelopment of housing (high rise, too many new developments)	28
Catching Covid-19	21
Native forestry harvesting	18
Social isolation	16
Urban sprawl	14
Offshore detention	9
None of these	2

Base: all research participants (weighted)

Community concerns

Question ‘Which of these are areas where you currently have concerns?’

The biggest concern is the ‘cost of living in general’ held by seventy-nine percent (79%) of research participants.

In this list ‘native forest harvesting’ was a concern for eighteen percent (18%) of research participants.

Table 16: Q10 Current community concerns

Base: 2,200

	NET	Greater Sydney	North East Region
Cost of living in general	79	78	84
Cost of housing owning or renting	59	58	64
Interest rates	53	53	51
Climate change	47	48	44
Negativity in the world (media, social media, people in general)	39	37	47
Lack of public services (hospitals, health, public transport)	38	37	42
Aged care	34	33	36
Fake news	32	32	33
Overpopulation	30	31	24
Overdevelopment of housing (high rise, too many new developments)	28	30	23
Catching Covid-19	21	23	16
Native forestry harvesting	18	17	22
Social isolation	16	17	14
Urban sprawl	14	15	11
Offshore detention	9	9	8
None of these	2	2	1

Base: all research participants (weighted)

There are differences by broad region. Concern with ‘cost of living in general’ is higher in the North East Region (84%) than the Greater Sydney area (78%).

Concern with ‘native forestry harvesting’ is higher in the North East Region (22%) than in the Greater Sydney area (17%).

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Table 17: Q10 Current community concerns

Base: 2,200

	NET	Sydney metropolitan area	Blue Mountains	Central Coast	Richmond - Tweed	Coffs Harbour - Grafton	Mid North Coast	Hunter Valley - excluding Newcastle	Newcastle and Lake Macquarie
Cost of living in general	79	77	94	90	89	88	83	87	79
Cost of housing owning or renting	59	57	63	63	69	67	60	68	57
Interest rates	53	53	50	55	56	44	49	57	47
Climate change	47	48	50	43	48	42	47	37	45
Negativity in the world (media, social media, people in general)	39	37	25	46	53	54	49	42	45
Lack of public services (hospitals, health, public transport)	38	36	38	54	42	43	44	42	38
Aged care	34	32	44	39	41	41	42	31	32
Fake news	32	32	19	36	36	41	32	30	30
Overpopulation	30	31	69	31	25	30	29	18	24
Overdevelopment of housing (high rise, too many new developments)	28	29	44	36	21	17	27	23	23
Catching Covid-19	21	22	13	34	19	22	18	14	13
Native forestry harvesting	18	17	25	22	28	22	27	14	20
Social isolation	16	16	6	24	16	14	13	12	15
Urban sprawl	14	15	13	16	12	9	9	9	13
Offshore detention	9	9	6	7	9	9	9	6	9
None of these	2	2	0	1	0	2	1	2	1

Base: all research participants (weighted)

There are differences by secondary region.

Concern with 'native forestry harvesting' is lower in the Sydney Metropolitan area (17%), and higher in Richmond-Tweed (28%) and Mid-North Coast (27%).

Community concerns

9.2.3 Concerns with ‘trees and forests’

Research participants were asked specifically about concerns with ‘trees and forests’. The topics came from the qualitative research stage.

Table 18: Q11 Concern with trees and forests

Base: 2,200

	%
Bushfires	66
Loss of native habitat	64
Land clearing for new home development	50
Native forestry harvesting	34
Land clearing on farms	27
Other concern	2
None of these	9

Base: all research participants (weighted)

Question: ‘Thinking of trees and forests, which of these are areas where you currently have concerns?’

The biggest concern is ‘bushfires’ for sixty-six percent (66%) followed by ‘loss of native habitat’ (64%). In the context of ‘trees and forests’, thirty-four percent (34%) have concerns with ‘native forestry harvesting’.

Table 19: Q11 Concern with trees and forests

Base: 2,200

	NET	Greater Sydney	North East Region
Bushfires	66	66	65
Loss of native habitat	64	63	67
Land clearing for new home development	50	49	53
Native forestry harvesting	34	33	35
Land clearing on farms	27	28	22
Other concern	2	2	2
None of these	9	9	9

Base: all research participants (weighted)

For broad geographic areas the only difference is ‘land clearing on farms’, which is higher for residents of Greater Sydney (28%) than those from the North East Region (22%).

Concern with ‘native forestry harvesting’ is higher for residents of Richmond-Tweed (43%) and Mid-North Coast (40%).

10 Timber and people

10.1 Timber and people overview

Participants, even those in Sydney, appreciate trees and impact they have on the environment. The advantage of living in North East NSW is having access to abundant nature options. There are outdoor opportunities literally at their doorstep and most take advantage of their surrounds.

The two biggest threats identified by participants at this stage of the focus group to their surrounding areas are urbanisation and fires. Fires are dangerous and destructive, but participants discussed how well-equipped nature is at recovering after a threat such as a fire. Many have observed the way a forest can recover over a few years from being burnt out and destroyed to being green and growing again.

Urbanisation is however a non-recoverable problem for nature.

10.2 Nature, trees and threats

Participants were asked to consider how they interact with the natural environment in their area. Participants were taken through this process in the groups, as it provided a pathway to a discussion about trees which then led to forestry.

The ways participants engage with nature are:

- Live in 'the bush'
- Walking
- Children excursions: alternative to 'electronics'
- Ride horses or walk dogs
- Appreciate the beauty
- Camp
- Don't have much of a relationship

Examples of feedback are:

It's really accessible for me, 30 minutes it's heavy bush or 30 minutes to the beach. I love my horses so I do love taking them and I love swimming in the ocean with them. You get to see dolphins and sometimes seals. It's so beautiful [Forestry]

I'm a part of it, I'm living right in the middle of it. My property, I've got a river that's like a horseshoe that comes around me. I've got platypus in the river, I've got turtles. I wake up in the morning and I see little wallabies sitting outside, I've got wedgetail

Timber and people

eagles in the sky, lots and lots of birdlife, parrots, they all come inside. I've got goannas that come up to the front door, there is a young one that comes and he's only about 0.5 metre long, but he falls asleep on my feet. There are some beautiful big goannas here, everything is on steroids, all the wildlife here [Forestry]

I walk every day in nature I start my day that way it just gives me that sense of peace and connection to mother earth and nature, centres myself and it's important in the line of work that I do as well. So that is part of my daily regimented routine I guess [Greenbelt]

Screenless family time, we'll go for walks in the National Parks. My parents in-law have a farm an hour away so we often go there and spend some time there and also use that as a base to go to parks nearby and bushwalking. It's just about having some family time away from screens. Connecting [North Coast]

Maybe I don't take advantage of living in a rural area as much as I should but its either boiling hot or freezing cold or snake season [Tablelands]

Participants were then asked to consider what the benefits of trees are. Response were:

- Provide a sound barrier
- Important for animals and wildlife - provide homes and shelter
- Shade
- Calming presence - help with quality of life
- Lovely to look at
- Good for the environment

In each focus group people described how they felt 'sad' or upset when they saw trees being removed.

Recently seeing all the trees getting ripped down around the big roundabout which heads out towards Maitland, it was quite gut wrenching watching all the trees be removed. Seeing that sort of stuff where things are just ripped to pieces, just for the sake of putting in some concrete, obviously yes it makes people lives easier if it means they can drive their car through there, I just found that uncomfortable in a lot of ways [Newcastle]

Those who were less moved feel comfortable that trees are able to grow back and regeneration will happen.

I've always appreciated trees. I was born in Northern Ontario so there's nothing but trees, lakes and bears. But we also did have lumbering that happened not too far away so I'm used to seeing the lumber trucks, I'm used to seeing I'd say a devastation of an area but I also see them straight after they've done do a massive replant [Sydney]

The main threats to trees as described by participants are:

- Urbanisation

Housing estates. It was scrub, bush, marshlands and it all got levelled and all of these new housing estates have gone in, which is great seeing people coming to the area but there should be some areas, especially our marshlands there are so many natives that are going extinct because they're not being protected [Forestry]

- Fires

They've suffered since the fires. I've got apple gums which has got a very soft bark, so that is still black. Before the fires around the river, I had lots of tree ferns and things like that. It is all starting to come back, it's amazing how it happens. I've actually got more birdlife than I had before the fires, more variety. It's quite incredible seeing all the changes and how it goes and the resilience of the bush and the animals. I was really worried that the fires because all the water was putrid after that and I thought, the platypus won't survive that but sure enough they are all back. It's just beautiful [Forestry]

10.3 Wood - uses and issues

10.3.1 Summary

Participants described how they rarely think about wood, and yet once they were asked about wood, they realised they use wood all the time. All participants have wood furniture, their houses have either wood supports or are made of wood and they use paper every day. They concede paper usage will become more limited, but wood products are long lasting and nice to use. It is superior to other products such as plastic. Wood was described as environmentally friendly and sustainable.

Most participants discussed how they like having wood in their lives. They like the look and feel and believe it adds to their environment, not detracts. The major value of wood lies its longevity, its creative qualities (furniture etc), the solid permanent presence it creates and its sustainable characteristics. Participants believe there is always a role for wood in their world.

Wood is not without its detracting elements. The main ones raised are: wood is costly for heating, old growth forests have suffered, urbanisation is affecting the trees available for koalas, wood is often wasted and alternatives may need to be found.

10.3.2 Timber and its uses

Wood usages

Participants were asked to consider what they use wood for and the role wood plays in their lives. Their responses are:

- Furniture: beds, tables, desk, sofa, pictures on wall
- Household usage: Cupboards, chopping boards
- Firewood
- Housing
- Paper
- Flooring
- Barbeque
- Toilet paper

Supporting quotes to illustrate these responses are:

Obviously I use wood a lot here for heating, I work in a school so we use a lot of paper. I actually like wooden furniture so I'm a consumer of wood. I love wooden floors all that sort of stuff, so I'm not anti at all [Tablelands]

I'm a writer, I wouldn't have paper without it. Thinking about it now everything around me has got wood in it, my sofa, pictures on the wall, the speaker on the computer, wood is everywhere. I hadn't thought about it until you brought it up. It is everywhere, we need it [Forestry]

Value of wood

- Lasts longer than other products

And it lasts longer as well. Wood, especially having horses, whenever you're getting your posts ready, it's always recommended that you take from your own farm because they're acclimatised to your area [Forestry]

- Enjoy living in wood houses and using wood products

One of the things I loved about that was the fact that you were surrounded by wood, wooden floorboards, everything was wood. The house I live in here is wood cladding around the outside. It's something which I think is quite important [Newcastle]

- Wood will always be needed

It still plays a pivotal role for me, it's not as though we can do away with that resource. I think there is still going to be paper usage. We're still going to need wood, paper, as a necessity. It's going to be a fact of everyday life for the time being. We

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might see a change in the digitalisation and the different technology but at the moment wood and paper is here to stay [Lower Hunter]

- Wood furniture is superior to cheap furniture. It is durable and lasts longer

It's an interesting thing I really like the old recycled wood actually I'm just looking at the coffee table I'm sitting at now and this coffee table it's made from wood essentially probably the top of the coffee table is about 100 years old, it came from a butcher shop in Wauchope Northern NSW, it's beech or something like that. I like the old recycled wood, I love the texture of wood [Sydney]

- It makes 'beautiful furniture

Beautiful, growing is beautiful. My son, he used to have a mill, a portable mill that you take to the tree, he was asked a Huon Pine had to come down, he was asked to take that down, he built the most beautiful table and chairs out of it. That didn't go to waste and it's beautiful, it's such a pretty wood. To me, the normal things like everyone else has. I do appreciate it; I do like it. It's good to see it grow, if it has to be cut down it is good to see that it's not just thrown away [Forestry]

- Environmentally friendly

Most of those pines you can have back at full grown in under five years. Iron ore - whilst I love metal framing I'm with Chris though I lived in Newcastle way too long to have enough steel in the house. But iron will run out in about heading to 150 years but trees don't, you always be able to put it in again and wood has a lot more purposes, nice finish and a lot of building things [Tablelands]

- Sustainable

I think wood is a better option. Even when it does fall apart at least you can burn it. Whereas all the fake furniture it is just landfill and it takes ages to break down. If wood is breaking down, wow you get mushrooms, it's a symbiotic relationship [North Coast]

- Irreplaceable: Wood is better than the alternatives that are currently available

I think wood is timeless, I think it is being used for a long time and I think it is environmentally friendly. If there was something that could take the place of wood, we would have it by now. Plastic is not going to do it. I think it's an essential material [North Coast]

Issues with wood

Participants prefer wood over the alternatives. However some participants did raise some drawbacks to the use of wood. These are:

- Wood is costly, particularly for building and heating

I think one of the big topic conversation at the moment is about the increasing cost of wood for timber for building maybe as well, that has escalated by 35 to 50% in its value [Forestry]

Timber and people

And it's also not cheap when you try and compare it. When we first moved here people said you'll save so much money on electricity having a wood fire but that's really not true. It's very expensive [Tablelands]

- Australia has to import wood because we have decimated the forests

A builder friend of mine said that it takes 20 years for a tree to grow to a sufficient state for it to be felled. That's a huge amount of time and he said we're importing so much timber now whereas before we used to export because we decimated the lumber that we have got here [Sydney]

- More wood should be grown by farmers

I guess it all goes into my understanding of how much timber prices have increased for house renovations and what have you that there is a great opportunity I think for a lot of farmers that have underutilised land to building forest on their land for a future income and I know it takes a long time as you said xxx to grow a tree to fell it. But there is opportunity there that might be underutilised in our economy at the moment in our country [Sydney]

- Forestry is irresponsible and old growth forests are logged

It's an essential resource and it's a renewable resource at that. What I'm surprised and gobsmacked at is that the industry has not be able to stop the logging of old growth forests in favour of plantations. Plantations make much more sense, old growth forests of course if you get a lease; I presume access to the wood is free but it is incredibly irresponsible to chop down old growth forests to make tables and chairs, even though tables and chairs and homes need timber and it's an essential ingredient in the building industry and other industries. But I think like so many things it's been bereft of good policy [Sydney]

- Sometimes cheap wood is used to build furniture and it does not last

A lot of the cheap furniture which people can only afford to buy is not meant to last long and it doesn't, move out of the flat and it's dumped out on the street, if only in an attempt to offer it to someone else half the time or it just falls apart. And it's designed so that people will buy more furniture [Sydney]

- Urbanisation leads to the removal of trees and this also leads to the removal of natural habitats for Koalas

Clear filling there's still pretty much to go, people are more worried about koalas but nothing is happening to stop encroachment of suburbia and they're getting runover all the time. Its right on the cards Australian koalas will be extinct apart from koala sanctuaries within the next 10 to 15 years [Sydney]

- Wood is often wasted on building sites

But I think if I was going to have my input on the conversation from being a carpenter like I started my kind of business a couple of years ago more officially last year basically just using recycled reclaimed timber. And that was because after years of working in more commercialised construction or what not just seeing the amount of

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waste that there was. And just being like wow there is so much energy and time put into these forests and then all this work done all this land clearing and how five to 10 years for them to grow and then I don't half of it gets chucked out and half of it just ends up in the waste bin [Green]

- Alternatives to wood need to be found. In this quote the participant is talking about steel, but cement and hemp were also raised as viable alternatives

Before I moved here I was working full time for a company called One Steel and they were in the business of building houses without wood with steel frames, that's really good in bushfires. With bushfires we truly lost so many homes I think we need to be looking at different ways of keeping the wood that we've got and using different products if we can when we can [Tablelands]

Understanding of hardwood

11 Understanding of hardwood

11.1 Qualitative understanding of hardwood

11.1.1 Qualitative summary

In each focus group, some participants were able to distinguish between softwood and hardwood, although it was often a logical summation rather than from a knowledgeable perspective. Some participants did not know the difference.

Participants, once the topic was explored understood there are pine forests that are often defined by the orderly way they present (plantations) and hardwood forests are those that contain trees such as eucalypts and are not grown in plantation style.

11.1.2 Softwood and hardwood: differences

The uses and characteristics used by participants to describe softwood are:

- It is made from pine trees
- Quick growing wood
- More like paperbarks and found in marshy areas
- It is a softer type of wood
- It scratches easily
- Pinewood has replaced native timber forests
- It is used for:
 - Houses
 - Floorboards
 - Firewood

The uses and characteristics used by participants to describe hardwood are:

- The types of trees are cedars, Ironbark, native trees to Australia
- Older denser tree than a softwood
- It is much harder than softwood
 - For example, it is difficult to drill into
- It is not used for making certain types of furniture
 - It is not delicate or malleable enough
- These trees take a long time to grow
 - Take longer to burn
- Have to have permission to cut them down

Understanding of hardwood

- More expensive to buy
- It is used for:
 - Building houses

Supporting quotes to illustrate these responses are:

Hardwood is very difficult to drill into. And the right drilling speed to drill into and then pine is a softwood it scratches it's often used in flooring in houses, we've got pine flooring in our house which I love its very old school. It scratches easily [Sydney]

It does if you're a carpenter because the choice of wood is essential to what you're building. Oregon for example is used for construction of homes because it has a lot of strength, but it may not be ideal to make it into a fine piece of furniture because of its properties [Sydney]

I know redwoods are a harder wood and your cedars, they are denser. They take longer to burn and take longer to grow. Your softwoods are more like your paper barks, they're usually found more in your marshy areas [Forestry]

If I'm buying a hardwood table I'm going to be paying a lot more than softwood [Sydney]

Understanding of hardwood

11.2 Quantitative understanding of hardwood

11.2.1 Understanding of timber conclusion

The qualitative research shows that people love the look and feel of wood in general, however the quantitative findings show that understanding of hardwood and its uses is limited.

The results shows that hardwood uses may not be understood therefore the value the community places on it as an important resource is limited buy lack of knowledge.

11.2.2 Hardwood and softwood

These questions were asked to understand NSW residents' knowledge and understanding of hardwood timber and its uses.

Table 20: Q12 Know the difference between hardwood and softwood **Base: 2,200**

	%
Yes	54
No	46

Base: all research participants (weighted)

Only just over half (54%) know the difference between the two types of timber.

Table 21: Q12 Know the difference between hardwood and softwood **Base: 2,200**

	NET	Greater Sydney	North East Region
Yes	54	51	65
No	46	49	35

Base: all research participants (weighted)

Residents of the North East Region (65%) have a better understanding of the difference between hardwood and softwood than residents of Greater Sydney (51%).

Understanding of hardwood

Table 22: Q12 Know the difference between hardwood and softwood

Base: 2,200

	Sydney metropolitan area	Blue Mountains	Central Coast	Richmond - Tweed	Coffs Harbour - Grafton	Mid North Coast	Hunter Valley - excluding Newcastle	Newcastle and Lake Macquarie
Yes	50	81	57	68	61	72	65	60
No	50	19	43	32	39	28	35	40

Base: all research participants (weighted)

The findings show that residents of most regional areas feel they understand the difference between the two types of timber more than other areas.

Understanding of the difference between hardwood and softwood is higher in:

- Blue Mountains - 81%
- Richmond-Tweed - 68%
- Mid-North Coast - 72%
- Hunter Valley - 65%
- Newcastle and Lake Macquarie - 60%

11.2.3 Uses of hardwood

Research participants were given the following information about hardwood.

Most of the softwood which is produced in Australia is exotic pine (Radiata pine and Southern pine) that is used for house frames and trusses, decking, plywood, laminated veneer lumber, paper, cardboard and linerboard. It is not as durable as hardwood unless it is treated.

Hardwood produced in Australia comes from eucalypts that are grown in native forests and less commonly in commercial plantations. Australian hardwood is strong, naturally durable, and visually attractive coming in a variety of shades and colours. Its characteristics make it suitable for outdoor applications where longevity and strength is important and for decorative indoor applications.

Uses include:

- Flooring and decking
- Panels and stairs
- Power poles
- Wharves and bridges

Understanding of hardwood

- *Landscaping and fencing*
- *Industrial and mining*
- *Furniture*

Table 23: Q13 Previously aware of these uses of hardwood

Base: 2,200

	%
Yes, all uses	15
Yes, some uses	59
No	26

Base: all research participants (weighted)

Only fifteen percent (15%) were aware of all uses of hardwood. Fifty-nine percent (59%) were aware of some of the uses of hardwood and just over one-quarter (26%) were not aware of any of the uses of hardwood.

Table 24: Q13 Previously aware of these uses of hardwood

Base: 2,200

	NET	Greater Sydney	North East Region
Yes, all uses	15	14	18
Yes, some uses	59	58	64
No	26	28	19

Base: all research participants (weighted)

Awareness for all uses of hardwood is higher in the North East Region (18%) than in Greater Sydney (14%).

11.2.4 Does home have hardwood

Research participants were asked if they believe the home where they live has hardwood in use.

Table 25: Q14 Home includes hardwood

Base: 2,200

	%
Yes	46
No	31
Don't know	23

Base: all research participants (weighted)

Understanding of hardwood

Just under half (46%) believe their home contains hardwood. This will have been informed by the uses of hardwood described in the introduction to question 19.

Residents of Richmond-Tweed are more likely to believe their home contains hardwood (59%) than all other areas.

Hardwood is felt to be used in less than half of all homes but twenty-three percent (23%) do not know if their home contains hardwood.

State forests and National Parks

12 State forests and National Parks

12.1 Summary

Participants are not all clear on the distinction between a State forest and a National Park although in each group there generally were one or two people who did understand the differences.

The differences that were consistently raised across all focus groups is a State forest is a little more open to a variety of activities that can take place inside it and it can be a working forest (Forestry).

National Parks preserve and protect the habitats; they are not productive.

12.2 Differences - State forests and National Parks

State Forests are thought to:

- Be different and separate to National Parks
- Are working forests
 - Hardwood and softwood
 - Ability to 'log' wood
- Can take dogs and ride horses on the trails
- Run by the Forestry 'Commission'

National Parks are thought to:

- Protect hardwood trees
- Protect wildlife
- Protect habitats
- National Parks are not working forests
- Some recreational activities are allowed, for example camping
- Owned by the Federal Government

Supporting quotes to illustrate these responses are:

I think there's National Parks and then everything else that's leftover is run by the state and then the state has designated parks as well and then they are responsible for the territory within it. [Newcastle]

State forests in my opinion are run to give you all the softwood resources that you need whereas the National forests are more the hardwood that needs to be protected

State forests and National Parks

and it's the habitats and the food sources. I don't know anything beyond that [Tablelands]

I always thought the national forest was protected where you couldn't do logging things like that it would have to be for recreational for the environment. Whereas the State forest you could do logging and have the trails and things like that, that was my idea, but I could be totally wrong [Sydney]

From my point of view the difference to me is the National Parks are protected and the State forests aren't. You can do more things in a State forest, National Parks are protected. To me they seem a little more special [North Coast]

I think it's run by the Forestry Commission and the State Government and the purpose of the State forest is to grow trees in order that they can be cut down and used for whatever that licence may be. Whereas you can't do that in a National park, you can't in fact I think you set aside a National park in order for there to be no change it's the true definition of conservation I think isn't it? [Greenbelt]

12.3 Attitudes towards forests

12.3.1 Summary

Participants were asked what they liked about 'forests' and if they held any concerns for them. At this point in the discussion, there was no distinction between State forests and National Parks.

All participants like there are spaces available where people can go and be 'in nature'. Being in the bush has a liberating and freeing feeling for many. There are strategies in place to protect forests, habitats are preserved, they are good for the environment and there are activities available, such as camping that people can enjoy.

There are some concerns held for forests. The two key ones are fires and logging. Fires are devastating and destructive although participants feel forests can regroup from fires. Logging is a concern for participants in the Greenbelt and Forestry; they have local issues which include the logging trucks, the State forests being an 'excuse' for logging and there can be a lack of confidence in the way the forests are logged.

12.3.2 Positive aspects of forests

The aspects they most like about a State forests and National Parks are:

- Forests provide space for people to enjoy nature
 - They are an alternative space to a city or town and allow people to leave their homes and enjoy unrestricted outdoor spaces
 - Enjoy activities such as camping

State forests and National Parks

I think it's also the joy of getting away from a town. Go out somewhere where it's a bit different. We all appreciate something that's a bit different in a lot of ways. People enjoy going camping and getting into nature and taking a breath and not being stuck in front of a computer and all those sorts of things. It's good for your own mental well-being and health. I think that's one of the key factors to why they're so important [Newcastle]

- Publicly owned

- This means there are rules and restrictions in place to protect certain species

Being publicly owned protects them as well. The land just can't be sold and the trees cut down [Newcastle]

I'm not quite sure. I do know that you're not allowed your dogs in the National Park. There is usually a lot of protected animals and protected species. There is a lot of rare, especially up in the Clarence, there is a lot of different rare kingfishers and stuff like that. You're not allowed your pets and whenever I want to take my horses it's not as simple as me just going in and riding on the national trail, I do have to contact the local rangers and let them know what dates I'm going, what area I'm going [Forestry]

- Essential for the environment

- Forests are thought to reduce carbon dioxide
- They have the ability to cool the climate
- They provide clean air

That's the other bonus with trees and plants they will remove carbon dioxide and oxygenate the world which is very important for us as humans. It does make a big difference in that respect [Newcastle]

I guess the thing about trees is that they're beautiful they provide a habitat and security for our flora and fauna. It might help preserve the soil, they are better converted with oxygen we're getting carbon dioxide which we need to breathe and they help us to lessen the impact of global warming [Sydney]

- Protect and manage the forest

- Some participants believe there are strategies in place to protect the forests and the wildlife it homes
- This also includes trying to protect the forests from fires

They come through, I always see guys from the forestry coming through and checking for regrowth and weeds and getting rid of the weeds and making sure the undergrowth isn't going to be inundated with overseas weeds, just crap really and baiting for wild cats, dogs and things like that to protect wildlife. I see a positive side of it [Forestry]

Probably I guess it comes down to the people using it as well as the people they employ to maintain it as well. Whether it is overused from four-wheel driving or rubbish being left behind things like that they have things in place to manage and prevent those sorts of things causing damage. There is always going to be people that may misuse it but they seem to be on top of it, there is always a dozen National Parks or areas closed in

State forests and National Parks

this local area because of various reasons for maintenance or storm damage things like that but they seem to be proactive in its management [Greenbelt]

- Restrictions on what activities can take place (National Parks)

I'm not quite sure. I do know that you're not allowed your dogs in the National Park. There is usually a lot of protected animals and protected species. There is a lot of rare, especially up in the Clarence, there is a lot of different rare kingfishers and stuff like that. You're not allowed your pets and whenever I want to take my horses it's not as simple as me just going in and riding on the national trail, I do have to contact the local rangers and let them know what dates I'm going, what area I'm going [Forestry]

- Forests are well maintained

If you go to a state park that is for visitors, you always see a ranger and they are always well maintained. I don't know how the vast amount of the forest is [Forestry]

12.3.3 Concerns about forests

Participants appreciate the number of trees and forests available to them but there are some participants who also hold concerns about them. The main concerns are:

- Fires

- Fires can be destructive and those living in North East NSW have even recently lived through intense fires. One participant in these groups had lost their home as a result of a fire
- Fires, are cause for concern, but some participants also feel they are necessary for regeneration

But that was the first time I noticed it driving along the highway, I would never pay any attention to what was out there and then when you see all the burnt trees that was like the first oh shit kind of moment [Sydney]

As for the bushfire thing one thing I was told there was a massive bushfire in Canada, it started by a lightning strike but I was actually told that the fires are actually healthy for the forest as well. I don't know how but apparently it is [Sydney]

- Logging

- Participants refer to 'harvesting' as logging
- There were participants in each group that have concerns with logging. These concerns are:
 - They find the logging of trees confronting. Words such as 'devastating' and 'confronting' are used to describe how they feel

I agree with everyone in the group. I've been to, I don't know if it was a park where it's happened or it was farmland where they are logging spree, but it is a bit confronting or haunting to see half a forest cut down [Newcastle]

State forests and National Parks

- Those who live locally feel the logging trucks are dangerous and one participant reported there had been fatalities in the area where they live from accidents from logging trucks

I have got a friend who lives out the back of Taree, at Wherrol Flats and he has always got problems because the road is only one lane in, he has always got problems with the logging trucks. They come flying down, they've killed a couple of people. They are always having problems with them, people are getting run off the road, that sort of thing. The road has got to be widened or something has got to be done there, I'm not sure what. Whether they fell them at night is maybe safer and a way to manage better, the logging industry [North Coast]

- One participant feels the State forests are an 'excuse' for logging

National forest to me is more preserved and more natural than a State forest. I think a State forest is an excuse for logging pretty much. Up here in the Bulga Forest they've just finished, it's very green up here, the political climate is very green, they all camped out and went up trees and stayed in the trees for 40 days to stop the logging. This has only just happened in the last few months. It has only just finished, and they have put a stay on the forest so that the loggers were actually taken off and gone to log somewhere else because there are some pristine forests up here that is just virgin and untouched. We've got the gliders up here and all of that. It is very fragile and learning about that with this is interesting because of all the infrastructure that the bush has right down to the mosses and how much that is needed for the different animal and wildlife [Forestry]

- The forests lack diversity due to the ineffective re-planting process

I see a positive side of it. I also see the side where they do some clear-fell in the forest, I go down through Dingo Tops and there are some areas that plants are wiped out. A concerning thing with that is that they say they're going to replant and replant but they are only replanting certain types of trees. The regrowth you're getting doesn't have the diversity of the forest that they cut down, that's what I notice. I'm against that [Forestry]

- One participant believes wood has to be imported because the forests have been over-logged

I can only go by what my friend told me, we have next to no timber that we can harvest at the moment because we have used it all, we've exported it all and we haven't regrown sufficient [Sydney]

- National Parks are not well maintained: One participant does not believe the National Parks are maintained to a satisfactory level

I'm going to disagree not agree but I would say I have not seen what xxxx has seen. I see a lot of rundown National Parks that they're not keeping up with the rubbish, they're not keeping up with the paths, it's like I never see anyone there, like maintenance. I would disagree [Greenbelt]

State forests and National Parks

12.4 Forest management

12.4.1 Summary

Focus group participants were introduced to the topic of forestry. To begin, they were asked how well they thought the forests were managed.

The reality is most people do not think about how forests are managed, with many participants unable to contribute to this topic.

Forest management is mainly thought about by those who live in an area where there are forestry activities and those who have read or have an interest in forests. For those who did have some input, the key feedback about how forests are managed is:

- There should be more ‘backburning’ and hazard reduction
- Indigenous Australians should be more involved in the management of forests
- Managing a forest is influenced by
 - The right conditions being available
 - Bureaucracy; it is a complicated process
 - ‘Greens’: they do not allow trees to be cut down
 - Undergrowth is not well managed
 - Climate change
- ‘Logging’ is indiscriminate and the process is not transparent
- Facilities and trails are well maintained

12.4.2 Forest management feedback

Backburning and hazard reduction

Backburning and hazard reduction strategies were mentioned by participants in most groups. It is thought these are good practices to protect the forests from fires and there is a strong feeling that these practices have been limited due to political influences, particularly ‘The Greens’.

You need to be able to manage the undergrowth once you manage that you’re okay. With the old forests what they do wrong, the old forests are fine, they don’t burn, they’re not very flammable but you’ve got the regrowth forest and because they are a lot more open you get a lot more undergrowth and when you get that undergrowth and when you get some dry weather it just dries out and then you get the fires. You need to be able to control that, you need to be able to burn the undergrowth like the Aborigines do. People like the “greens” are stopping people managing their properties to be able to control that [Forestry]

State forests and National Parks

Managing bushfires is just behind the eight ball, whether it's that commercial forests or old growth forest there needs to be more management to reduce the risk of that keeping the undergrowth down and what we have left [Sydney]

Indigenous involvement

In every group participants discussed their interest in having Indigenous involvement in the managing of the forest by use of fire. There is admiration and trust in the Indigenous approach and strategies. Participants collectively believe they would feel a greater degree of confidence if there was indigenous involvement based on the belief that this community had effectively managed forests prior to colonisation and should be given the opportunity to demonstrate their wisdom.

I think I'm going to say they need to learn from the indigenous people and I have heard that they're getting some of the indigenous people and are creating models and doing smaller burns which is more in keeping with their seasonal burning. And part of me thinks that makes more sense smaller areas that you don't then get bushfires because that happens from the backburning and it also gives the animals the koalas, kangaroos time to move on, it's not this huge napalm type strip [Greenbelt]

Too many bureaucrats and they should be taking notice of what the Aboriginals are advising them to do [Sydney]

Management is dictated by external uncontrollable issues such as the weather

There were a few discussions about the need for the 'right' climate conditions to be available on the day of the planned management of the forest. Weather is variable and unpredictable and no matter how much planning has taken place, hazard reduction or backburning cannot take place if the conditions are not appropriate.

I have got family who work in the fire brigade, there is a difference between backburning and hazard reduction. One of them, a lot of it is red tape for being able to either do a hazard reduction or a backburn. They have to have these certain conditions, certain humidity, certain heat, certain wind speed, if the conditions are absolutely perfect that accounts for two weeks in the year. If there is any dew or rain they can't do anything about it [Greenbelt]

Alleged political interference

There is an attitude among some participants that forests cannot be managed effectively due to the influence of 'The Greens'. The Greens are perceived by some participants to be a political party that have an overly protective attitude and philosophy towards trees.

I hope they're managing them a lot better especially after the bushfires that we had. Some of the bushfires started over in Port and because the Greens wouldn't let anyone burn off in there it just got too green. I don't think anyone was really maintaining it, to be honest. That was burning for nearly five months [North Coast]

State forests and National Parks

Undergrowth management

Controlling the undergrowth, particularly in regrowth forests is thought not to be well executed. It was suggested that old growth forests had an inbuilt protection mechanism from fires, but the regrowth forests, with their higher degree of openness and undergrowth create a welcoming space for a fire to enter and spread.

You need to be able to manage the undergrowth, once you manage that you're okay. With the old forests what they do wrong, the old forests are fine, they don't burn, they're not very flammable but you've got the regrowth forest and because they are a lot more open you get a lot more undergrowth and when you get that undergrowth and when you get some dry weather it just dries out and then you get the fires. You need to be able to control that, you need to be able to burn the undergrowth like the Aborigines do. People like the "greens" are stopping people managing their properties to be able to control that [Forestry]

Climate change

Climate change was raised as an issue by one participant. It has been described to them that the weather patterns have changed so significantly that the length of time available for backburning has been significantly reduced which means there is not enough time to manage the forests properly.

I know RFS or SES, Rural Fire Service, Emergency Services, they were complaining that they just haven't been able to backburn because the timeframe is now shortened, they can't get it all done. What they were saying it was due to climate change, they can't get it all done in that time now. That's why they started looking at burning to lower the leaf litter and all that sort of thing. It seems to have worked on almost everything I've seen, working quite well [North Coast]

Indiscriminate 'logging'

One participant lacks confidence in the 'logging' process because the selection of the areas seems random and lacks planning. Sections of the forest are 'logged' and for this participant, there appears to be no strategy or reason. This observation has the effect of transferring to them a lack of trust in the process.

What surprises me is, I've seen situations locally where I'm like, that's a State forest and that's been there forever. But then I'll see it next time and there has been a whole bunch of clearing in it. That's really surprised me. When I say clearing, yes they've logged a whole bunch of it and I'm like but, oh we used to use that and now it's just a wasteland. For me the way the State forests are managed, yes they do logging for it, there is a program for it but it seems like it is fairly indiscriminate. I don't understand how they choose where they determine what's a good area to log in its entirety. That for me is the disappointing part of how they manage it, it's not very clear how they're making these selections [North coast]

State forests and National Parks

Facilities and trails are well maintained

Participants who go into the forests mostly feel the facilities are well maintained. There are toilets, camping sites and trails that are available for use.

If you go to a state park that is for visitors, you always see a ranger and they are always well maintained. I don't know how the vast amount of the forest is [Forestry]

A participant commented they would not like to see the State forests sold and become wary this research was trying to gauge public opinion for this. This participant, but others in the focus group agreed, discussed how even having that thought demonstrates there is a lack of trust towards government no matter which party is in power about protecting state owned resources.

Honestly I wouldn't know but my perception is that we are being very good at privatising our resources and it wouldn't give me a lot I wouldn't be surprised if we were willing to sell off just from a profit perspective for me [Sydney]

Harvesting in State forests

13 Harvesting in State forests

13.1 Qualitative research

13.1.1 Qualitative overview

Participants in all groups were shown images from websites and sourced through The Hub that represented:

- Conservation groups - taken from the websites of various groups
- Native forestry

Participants were asked to comment on these images; what they saw, how they made them feel, were they believable. The images are about native forestry.

13.1.2 Conservation images

The images shown were from a variety of websites. Links are:

Wilderness society: <https://www.wilderness.org.au/protecting-nature/deforestation/deforestation-explained>

Nature conservation society: <https://www.nature.org.au/>

North East Forestry Alliance: <https://www.nefa.org.au/>

The Guardian - <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/jul/17/nsw-remaps-old-growth-forests-to-open-up-reserves-to-logging>

The purpose of showing these images was to generate discussion about the possible impacts of native forestry in North East NSW.

Summary

Participants in the focus groups responded in one of three ways:

- The websites confirmed what they thought occurs and reacted with open hostility towards the native forestry industry
- The images were rejected as the photo on the website was considered an inaccurate representation of the native timber industry
- The images are confronting but they have reservations and would like to know more about the context of the photos

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Positive feedback

These images for some participants are an accurate representation of native forestry in NSW. It confirms what they believe. These participants discussed how they had seen images such as these on social media. They believe them to be true, accurate and trust the organisations as it allows them to understand what really occurs in native forestry harvesting.

The responses to the images by these participants are:

Accurate representation

- Some participants believe these images are accurate and reflect native tree harvesting in NSW. They are grateful there are organisations that are prepared to share the information so the public can know what actually happens in the native timber industry

My take is I've seen forests like this, and xxx is correct in a way that this is just one little sample, one little sample can be made to look really big... [Forestry]

Confronting

- It is confronting and disturbing to these participants that this is how the land is left after it has been 'logged'. The land has been significantly altered and most feel it will be degraded with the possibility of not being able to ever regenerate. Some are surprised this is how the industry operates

It's a bit shocking. I imagined logging that they just took a tree here and a tree there, I didn't realise that they obliterated the place. You think of all the wildlife, like you said how is that going to grow back in a hurry. I don't know whether they go and replant or how much of the forest they do this to, it's a bit confronting [Forestry]

Ecologically damaging

- A few feel that one of the biggest issues with forestry is the effect it has on the smaller eco-systems. These too are destroyed which means while trees may re-grow, the smaller but very important eco-systems will be permanently damaged and this permanently damages these forests

...this comes back to where it is clear fell there on the screen, it is not just the animal life either it's the mosses, it's the little and small plants and some of those will never come back. If they're gone then the wildlife that feeds off that is gone, including insects. You have to be very, very careful, you've got to make sure that you keep the biodiversity [Forestry]

Destructive

- There are deep concerns by some participants about the ability of the area in the photos ever being able to regenerate. Given the appearance, they feel it can never re-grow. Additionally it is not sustainable for now or the future

They are destroying everything, they're destroying the land, that's horrible [Forestry]

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That'll never grow back. There is nothing sustainable about that. That's a wasteland. It is devastating [North Coast]

Unbalanced transaction

- It is assumed that whoever is responsible for harvesting/logging trees in this manner only take from the environment and do not replace. Participants are concerned that there is environmental inequity; people or companies take, but they do not replant and they do give back to the environment.

For me especially the bottom right one because it looks like they're just like take, take, take; I feel like if they take the trees down from that area they should be planting something else, it just seem unnecessary you can't just take, take, take. If you take something you should give back in some way [Forestry]

Lack of accountability

- There is frustration that the timber industry is not made accountable for the environmental atrocities they create. These participants do not know who oversees forestry and therefore assume it is not being monitored or controlled. How could it be if these pictures are taken after a harvest/logging?

Whereas for a lot of these companies it's about money and not sustainability and now things like this trying to make people more accountable for how they're treating the forest [Sydney]

They've raped it, it's bare. It has destroyed animal life; they've taken everything away so not even seeds can drop so seedlings can start again. That's just an example of it going too far. It should be more controlled and surely it's a commodity, timber shortage, then stop exporting it, let's just use it for what we need it for, so we don't rape our land. It makes me really angry [North Coast]

Clear felling is not acceptable

- Some participants are disappointment that clear felling is still allowed in native forestry. They thought this was not a practice that occurs and subsequently, on seeing these photographs are appalled that clear felling is still allowed in Australia

In my opinion, as I said I'm 50/50, got to have logging of some description. I thought by now, especially in Australia, that we've learnt that clear felling land, especially like that, does no-one any good. Yes you get the wood at the time but with erosion and salt and everything else that comes with clear felling, that's just heartbreaking, absolutely heartbreaking. That will be an awfully long time before that land is useable again for anything. It gets windy, the top soil is gone because there is nothing holding it down [Forestry]

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Protesting is important

- Some participants have high regard for the protestors. They feel the protestors are brave plus they have a valid reason for protesting and support the messages and causes they are trying to draw attention to

It looks that everything in the world gets cleared, it's a bit biased in a way. I completely agree with the people that are standing up for the forest because you always feel like they're the little guys against the big guys that are cutting everything down [Lower Hunter]

Koala protection

- Koalas are a much-loved native animal and some participants believe native forestry is taking away crucial trees that will ensure their future existence

I was just noticing the other day that they were clearing land to do building but apparently it's koala habitat, they were saying 21 koalas died when they were clearing it, work that out. It was not on the news but that's what I heard [North Coast]

Negative feedback

The second type of response was a negative one. These participants do not believe these website images represent the native timber industry and do not accept the information that it is trying to portray.

The main criticism of the pictures is they are not representing native forests well and appear to be misleading in the information they are conveying. Some of the pictures are claiming to be showing a certain scenario, deforestation for example, but participants believe them to be hazard reduction.

There was more discussion among those who do not believe the images than there was from those who do. Not all participants appreciate the native timber industry, but they also do not appreciate information they do not consider accurate.

Their feedback about the images is:

Misleading

- There was discussion around the images being designed to create an emotional response by those who view it without having to provide accurate supporting information. Showing a picture conveys information but these participants consider its presentation to be misleading

It's someone selling a message that they believe in. It's obviously designed to evoke emotion of some sort or an emotional response from people. But I'm kind of on the same thinking the same thing as xxx was, it's I prefer to make informed decisions and the truth is usually somewhere in the middle but isn't it in all this sort of stuff [Green]

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I do think that this stuff gets politicised because on one hand this stuff looks very impactful emotionally but in terms of what you do day to day the importance of logging like you need the industry there. It hasn't become redundant by any stretch of the imagination [Tablelands]

Accurate but appropriate

- Some participants are familiar with the harvesting process and believe that while this is confronting it has been taken immediately after a harvest but it is an appropriate way to manage the process. In their opinion, the trees have to be managed this way so a new plantation can occur

How can I put it like in one hand as was mentioned before bottom right looks terrible however part of that is just the process at times when you are harvesting because you have to clear enough wood and then clear the stumps and then you can do your replant otherwise it's not just going to work [Tablelands]

Assumed purpose

- Many participants admitted to not knowing much about native tree harvesting. These images did not make them immediately dislike the industry but it did make them curious about the rationale behind the clearing and then what happens afterwards

I look at things like this because maybe it is done for a reason and the reason is a good thing and hopefully they have got a plan in place, these people that are cutting them down that they then reuse the land for another reason, or they would grow trees again so there would be processes followed through properly [Newcastle]

I guess when I see these pictures I think it would be good to understand what's behind it firstly because this is a planned clearing for some reason that is one thing. Could it be backburning could this be from clearing after some bushfire, so I don't automatically think this all man made for a bad reason, I actually also think other things could be behind it [Sydney]

Images are deliberately misleading

- There was a feeling of irritation and almost anger from some participants who feel these images are deliberately misleading. They feel the images are designed to damage the industry and many of the images are not related to native forestry. For example, there was consistent feedback across the focus groups that one image is either hazard reduction or backburning, but not a practice used in native forestry
- One 'Forestry' participant remarked how they have native forestry in their area and they have never seen any evidence of clear felling or fires used to clear the area after a harvest
- Some participants observed that a photo with protestors in it was actually taken in front of a native forest that appears to have been subjected to a fire. They were confused by this image and felt there needed to be more context around what was occurring in this situation. There were others who accept hazard reduction fires are important

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Deforestation top left, that looks more like bushfire damage backburning more than anything else not even backburning just forest fire [Tablelands]

And the picture on the top left is I presume a state-based agency is doing some land fire hazard reduction burns because the intensity of the fire is not the same as a bushfire, it seems to be like a control burn [Sydney]

Hazard reduction burning I think is something that Australia needs because when there hasn't been hazard reduction burning we have catastrophic bushfires. Uncontrollable huge fire storms that have swept through dozens of kilometres of land and laid waste to hundreds of homes and killed in some incidences hundreds of people [Sydney]

Yes it's interesting the two shots with the protesters you can see that the eucalypts have already been damaged by fire at some stage, either firing in preparation for felling or natural causes you can see all the shoots have been growing back for at least maybe a year or something. It would be interesting to know what's been happening there [Sydney]

Pine forest

- There were some participants who felt one of the images was a commercial pine forest, not a native forest. They could not see the relevance of one of the images to a native forest

The picture on the bottom right is a plantation that has been cleared probably for wood pole if you notice there are no tree stumps almost everything has been taken, I would say that that would go to wood chipping that would then be shipped to Japan and come back as paper. I think that is a commercial plantation [Sydney]

All forests are not equal

- There is strong support for old growth forests. Some participants make a clear distinction between old growth forests, native forests and plantations. There is a role for each and for these participants, it is not appropriate to be misleading by misrepresenting the forest type

Its smoking I mean there's no better image of death and hell ... I mean I'm a conservationist as you can tell but I'm very anti the extreme and the concept of a native forest and an old growth forest are very different to a plantation or the forest in general [Greenbelt]

Protestors

- Not all participants are sympathetic to protestors. The main criticisms of protestors are they are not properly conveying the information about native forestry, they do not provide context about where they are and what is genuinely going on in that area and they usually are too extreme in the position they hold. There is also a suggestion that some protestors are not local to the area which makes their message even less persuasive

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They're very emotive photos trying to get the message across but almost just you could say that depending on what they're using it for but I don't think it applies to forests that are grown for timber for example. And I think that's a completely separate thing and if anything it just gives people that are standing up for National Parks it makes them look bad because it associates them with people that aren't particularly maybe not as educated with what is going on and just think they're killing a tree is bad just like maybe killing I don't know, let's say, it is bad picking a fruit from a tree because you're harming the tree. It's really going to the one extreme and it actually is definitely more somewhere in the middle [Greenbelt]

I'm half and half because I don't really believe in destroying our land but at the same time I'm not a big person on protestors only because half the time, seven out of ten times, they don't actually have 100% of the facts. It annoys me in that aspect, it is like if you're going to do something do it 100% correct and make sure all your ducks are in a row [North Coast]

Then you've got these blow-ins that are coming in and giving you all the newest talking points from all these global, the climate change experts, giving you all these tips that are from them. Then you've got these old school men and women saying, no that's not how we run our land, we've done it successfully for multiple generations, listen to us, they're just arrogant and they say no. Who do you see on television, you see these blow-ins [Forestry]

Australia has good policies

- Australia is considered by some participants to have regulated industries and therefore it is assumed, native forestry will be ethical and legitimate. Australia is not like other countries that have less than ideal practices

But when I see that native forest logging stuff like I associate that more with overseas not so much with Australia, more like South Americas and places like that where obviously logging is, my general opinion is that that is more of an issue over there not so much in Australia I think we have got more respect for our native forests [Tablelands]

Confidence koalas are protected

- Not all participants are convinced that koalas are endangered to the point of extinction. There is agreement there are less koalas near the coast as a result of the 2019/2020 bushfires, but there is a belief that koalas are in other areas in NSW. Some have confidence that land is being set aside for koalas and that those working in National Parks or State forests are thought to be highly aware of the need to protect koalas during a hazard reduction or backburn
 - Land is set aside
 - Scouts go ahead to check

I agree I think these are all shock value type photos and when you really look at what's been said in the media and that certain areas are set aside for the koalas and maybe

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its not enough and it probably isn't enough but I think they try to do their best to even out what they're taking and what they're leaving [Tablelands]

That's why I'm half and half because they do the same thing when we do backburning. Like I said, my friend is a ranger, when they do backburning they have scouts that go ahead and make sure they move the animals and make sure there are no animals hiding in logs and that sort of stuff. That's where what I mean by I'm half and half. You do have people that do the right thing like the rangers where they make sure and move along, especially when they're doing the backburning, but they obviously can come back. It's still dead, they can't come back straightway [North Coast]

I still see koalas around Forster, not in Forster but around Forster and up at the farm. The farm had a lot before we had the fires a few years ago, they're coming back with the little joeys on their back. It's wonderful to see. When we're talking about trusting news sources, I trust what I see. I think that the areas that I've seen are very well taken care of, our farm and other ones where we put in the effort to keep these animals around. They are plentiful there [Forestry]

Small area is being harvested

- There were discussions in some of the focus groups about the actual amount of land that is harvested. There is a feeling for some that NSW, particularly in the North East coast has many trees therefore it is reasonable some of these are harvested

I think very differently about this. I must have a very big brain, people see those pictures and see two square kilometres of downed wood and go, oh my god that's disgusting, I look beyond the two kilometres to the other thousands of kilometres of bushland stretching beyond that and go, you're never going to get rid of all that, this is nothing [Forestry]

You fly for hours, and it is all green, there is nothing to worry about. As long as you relocate the animals, some of it has got to go [Forestry]

Mixed feelings

Determining how a person feels about native forestry does not come easily for everyone. These participants sit in an indecisive state not because they do not have any opinion, but because they find they are torn between different points of views and perspectives. Mostly they want information they can rely on and clarity.

The main issues are:

- Concern for the native life. The thought of animals dying or their habitats destroyed is upsetting
- Some feel hypocritical; they live in a house that is built out of wood which amongst other things has affected animals, there is a housing shortage so how can they say wood production should cease?

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- Trust in the native forestry is not strong for some participants. They have questions they would like answered if they are to feel comfortable with harvesting/logging. The main questions they have focus around:
 - Are the areas rejuvenated appropriately
 - Are old growth trees protected
 - Is all the wood used and/or is there minimal wastage
 - The end products are important but are they sustainably produced
- The last issues are around trusting an information source. Are the upsetting images to be believed? Are the conservationists telling the truth or a version of the truth? Are the images a misrepresentation and is the industry more ethical and honest than is being presented?

Animals

- Consistent feedback throughout the focus groups is the concern participants have to the native life. They do not like to think that the animals, and not just the koalas, suffer when trees are harvested

My instinct was that they have to cut these trees down because we need to get our stuff and do our stuff. Then on the other hand I didn't think at that point the animals that lived there. Do they live in the State forests or do they not? I don't know enough about it to know which way to go on it [Newcastle]

- Some participants are concerned not just about animals but other aspects of tree harvesting. They are also aware that there is a housing shortage and there is a perceived need for wood for building. They do not want to be hypocritical or uncaring

I think about the animals a lot, but I also have a home, I have a place to live whereas a lot of other people don't [Lower Hunter]

- Those who are indecisive about the industry stated one of the main reasons is because they are unsure if they can trust the industry. They are often not part of a community where there is logging, they read no positive information about the industry which tends to make them believe the information conveyed by the conservationist groups.

- They have no understanding if the areas which are harvested/logged are regenerated properly

The photos definitely are sad, and you could say that they make them look sad but it is sad. They have torn down and used all the trees and all the wood for humanity and for us to use but there could be, yes they have planted their own trees and that's just the aftermath, but it could also be that's literally what they've done and they're leaving it like that. Mixed feelings [North Coast]

- They are uncertain if old growth trees, despite being protected are respected

But if people are intelligent if you give them the right information if you say look we're going to have 10 acres just as an example of forestry, here pine, iron bark what have you, it's just like you got a farm of lettuce, it's not emotional. But when you

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have huge ancient grandfather trees that you're cutting down, the home and they create like xxx was saying they're home to like the lungs of the planet it's a different thing [Greenbelt]

- Many believe forestry needs to be a sustainable industry which means little wastage of a tree that has been harvested/logged. It concerns some that there is unnecessary wastage

Agree with xxx a little bit, you would like to know what they're doing with all the trees that they've knocked down and if they're recycling them. I've been around a few building sites over the years, and I've seen trees sitting there and wasting away. If they were using them for a purpose that is fine. I've been in and out of a few of those sites and the logs were piled up something shocking [Lower Hunter]

- There is an understanding there are products that are used everyday that come from wood, but to trust the industry (both native and soft wood) there needs to be some acknowledgement of how the product is made

You've got no idea whether they are the people that are doing the logging or the forestry or cutting down the trees are actually following the rules they're supposed to follow. If they're doing the right thing and they're chopping down trees or doing what they can to make sure that, yes we get toilet paper in Woollies, then that's their job [Newcastle]

More information required

The images had three types of responses: Belief, rejection and unsure. Those who are unsure feel having seen the images, they could be inspired to do some more research to understand their validity. These participants are aware information can be persuasive but not necessarily accurate.

If anything, it would make me want to do my own research and come to my own conclusions. It's probably the effect it has on me [Green]

Again, we know that there is always that little bit of a hidden agenda, for me I would be going, okay I would want to look at a more objective point of view on the industry. If the benefits outweigh the negative [Lower Hunter]

13.1.3 North East Forestry Hub

Participants were shown some different images that were sourced by the North East Forestry Hub. The two images were:

- A map of NSW indicating where native forestry takes place
- A series of three photos showing the cycle of native forestry
 - 30-45 year growth
 - Harvesting
 - Re-growth

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Image 1 - Map response

The map of where native forestry takes place and the extent of harvesting/logging that occurs in each area was met with positive, negative and unsure responses.

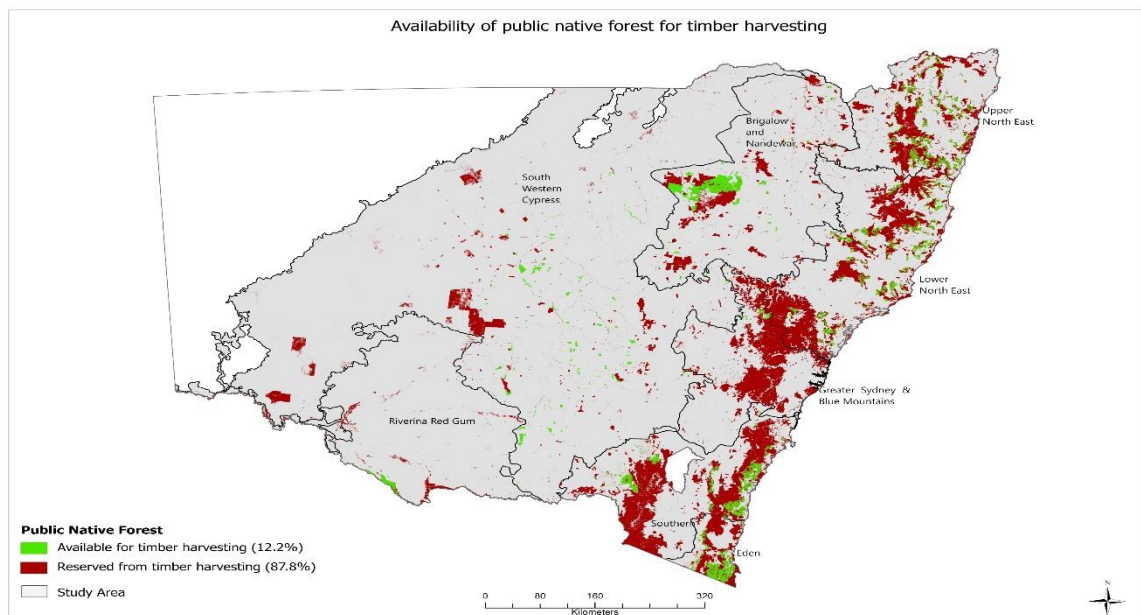
Those who responded positively were surprised the areas where native forestry occurs is small compared to the forests that are available and left untouched. That 12% of forests is set aside and of that 12% only a small proportion is cut, reassures them that the approach to native forestry is reasonable and well considered.

Participants who do not support native forestry did not believe the figures were accurate. They believe there is far more forestry occurring than what this map is showing. One participant felt this is an example of government misleading the public.

The last group are the 'fence-sitters'. They do not know a lot about the industry and are unsure if it is good or bad. If they are going to be persuaded one way or the other, they need to have more information than the map provided.

This information was confusing for many participants. The map and the percentages are a good way to show the proportions where harvesting/logging takes place, but this map was confusing for many. If information is confusing people immediately assume it is not accurate and for some, it makes them more hostile than before the conversation begun.

'Availability of public native forest for timber harvesting



Source: NSW Department of Primary Industries and Forestry Corporation of NSW

Participants were shown the above picture which the North East Forestry Hub had provided. The information the moderator provided about the map included:

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- A description of what the map is: a map of North East NSW
- An explanation the areas that are red are protected forests
- The areas that are green are areas where native forestry harvesting can occur which is 12% or the total forest area
- Each year a small proportion of the 12% is harvested

The range of responses from participants were positive, negative and unsure. There was also a discussion in many groups around the confusion the map created among participants.

Positive

Some participants commented that 12% seemed to be low as they thought it would be higher, even up to 30%. For these participants, 12% is a small percentage of the total area. Rather than feeling alarmed, they found themselves reassured that the area that forestry actually uses each year is small compared to the amount that is available.

I thought personally there would have been more than 12%. To me it sounds like it's a low amount. If someone asked me I would have said 30%. [Lower Hunter]

There is a lot that is protected [Sydney]

A lot more is protected than I probably thought [Sydney]

Yeah I mean it looks good I think I know driving through if you drive the back way through Walcha which you all probably do down Waterfall way stuff like that there is a lot of logging that goes on there. And it certainly still a hell of a lot of trees in that area, I think it's fairly positive [Tablelands]

A few participants observed that the areas where native forestry can occur are spread across NSW which means that no one area is being monopolised and overused. There was a positive reaction to this approach and they have to assume there is a justifiable reason for why these areas were chosen.

It's quite specific, if you look at the areas it's not like they've gone bang, we're going to hit this one area and that's our 10% and leave a massive hole somewhere. They seem to have quite strategically worked out this is where we can afford to take trees from whether that means it's an area that is uninhabitable or has less animals living in it so it becomes a safer place to remove trees from. It seems that they have thought about what they're doing rather than just plonking it all in one spot [Newcastle]

Negative

Those who have negative attitudes towards native forestry either completely rejected the figures, questioned the figures, or were people who it would not matter how big an area was harvested/logged, they will always have reservations.

The responses to the map were:

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- To question the figures. There was disbelief that these figures are correct and a belief the information is false

I'm thinking what a crock of lies, I don't trust them, they are lying. I think the green is more, to be honest to swap it around, available for timber, harvesting, they've got 12.2% but they probably harvest the red area and don't touch the green area. I don't trust them; I know they're lying. I've watched a lot of stuff and I have no respect or belief in any level of government from local council to federal, none of them. I think that's a lie. We are fed what they want us to know, what they want us to believe so we can go merrily along [North Coast]

- The areas of green are large and therefore it is assumed that all the area will be harvested/logged leaving large amounts of destruction behind them

Dead land, yes. If all that was removed and if all that was harvested, all that would be dead land. 50kms from Eden to the border and 20kms in width, that's a huge amount which would be trees right now, wasteland [North Coast]

- Some participants reflected back on practices in the past in Queensland and NSW and came to the conclusion these figures are surprisingly positive. They did not believe this information could be accurate

I'm just thinking back, it used to be a hot topic years ago about how much Australia, particularly Queensland was harvesting, and it wasn't getting replaced. Australia became itself one of the worst countries for deforestation. To say just in NSW 12% is available and the rest you can't touch it, it just seems really high [Lower Hunter]

Unsure

The last group of participants are unsure about what this information means to them.

It is important to understand that many participants do not hold strong opinions about native forestry. It is not something they think about often and confess to not knowing much about how it works, where it works and if it is a good industry or not.

The map resulted in the following comments by varying participants:

- Most want to believe that the information being provided is accurate, although many hold some reservations and therefore cannot believe the information completely

Obviously we have no idea whether that is the correct percentage of numbers, so you've got to hope that that's the correct percentage of numbers. They have to get trees from somewhere to do certain things. Being someone who really doesn't know whether that's good or bad, I look at 12% and say maybe that isn't as bad as it would be if it was 87% in that respect. It's not something I look at and say, wow that's alarming. If it was a larger number possibly I'd go wow that's extreme. Once again I have got no great experience in knowing how much impact that 12% makes on the particular area. Also, I've got no idea how long to regrow those areas (Newcastle)

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- Participants are more inclined to believe information if it is accessible and replicated in different places. If they read the same information multiple times then they remain convinced the information is to be believed

Forestry Corporation of NSW, that's their figures. I would like to see some other figures as well. It seems reasonable though, available for them to harvest 12%. They're saying that 87%, what I'd like to know is how much of that 87.8% is State forest [North Coast]

- The figures for some appeared positive and they would like to think they could trust the source and the information being provided. To make the map more convincing, some would like to know how established the protection of the 87% of forests is. If they are to accept this map and its information they would like to know the proportion of protected land will not change in the future

It looks like they're not touching as much as what you think and most of it is going to stay there, it looks good on a map. 12.2% and 87.8% is reserved, can that change tomorrow [Forestry]

- The map for a few participants, while helpful, leaves them wondering what happens in the whiter areas. It is a detail but it might help some people have a stronger and more complete opinion on whether the area where forestry occurs is significant or minimal

I think it's good at least there is a map and a plan they have located certain areas. It would be interesting to know what the rest of the land is used for if its farm land, there's a lot of little pockets of green all over the place, interesting to see what the rest of the land is used for. Is it pasture land is it farm land some other colours in there because it may not be much of land left or its considered not suitable [Sydney]

- There are a few reassurances participants are always seeking when it comes to forestry. The map is reasonable and the concept has approval, for some, so long as there is acknowledgment about how the animals are protected, if there is replanting and old growth trees are not included

We obviously could use more... untouched I suppose it depends on what the trees are if they are old growth 60 years to come don't touch it like that is national heritage kind of stuff. If it's stuff that you can churn over in a five-year window why not [Tablelands]

If you look at the data it looks like there is minimum to no amount, 12% yes you can still argue and be like there is still koalas and still animals in those parts that you are harvesting but then you could also argue and say 12% out of the 87% is not even half or a quarter [North Coast]

- There is acknowledgement that the map provides information about the amount of land that is used by forestry. The information it is providing is interesting and many are prepared to accept this is how native forestry is managed. For some participants, while the concept looks good, they are concerned that the areas that are harvested/logged each year, while small in area, will still be confronting. It is not until someone sees the impact they can understand the extent of the situation

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Looking at it on the map it does look okay, but I think there are large, some of the areas are very, very densely green and I'm thinking about how large of an area that is when you really zoom out. On a map of course it looks amazing but once you're down on the ground level it is obviously completely different story and I think you would need to take these areas more on a case-to-case basis depending on what is going on in the ecosystem [Forestry]

- There is an expectation the forestry industry will take care and be responsible for the maintenance of the land they use. Some participants would appreciate having these types of insights because it provides for them a more complete understanding of what occurs and then they can decide if they believe and support the industry

Yes, it's not as devastating. One is far more riddled in red tape than the other. The forest industry that looks after the 12% for instance there would be responsible there to maintain the area and maintain that land whereas if, we're talking the stuff in the red it sounds to me as though that is a no go, it doesn't get touched, it doesn't get managed, it doesn't even get a mowed lawn, it's left to do its thing. I could be wrong [Lower Hunter]

Confusion

A few participants found information to be confusing and the impact of that makes them uncertain. When someone is uncertain, they are unlikely to believe the information. Information needs to be immediately clear if it is to be believed and not all people are able to interpret information as easily as others.

Aspects that were confusing are:

- Are there trees outside of the red and green areas?

I think it's hard to say. It doesn't really mean anything to me, I can't visualise how much 12% is in that context and I'm also thinking if these are the green and the red are the public native forest but what is happening with all the trees outside of those areas, are they being forested too [Newcastle]

- Does the green areas include plantation forests?

Because it says native forests which makes you think it's not plantation so if that is 12% if you are taking 12% of our native forest then that means there is an awful lot of plantation forests that exists in here so I'm saying you leave all the public native forests alone and you go get your plantation forest somewhere else [Greenbelt]

- Some found it conceptually unclear as it raised more questions than it answered. Information is welcome, but clarity is what helps people create trust. Poor communication leads to comments like this

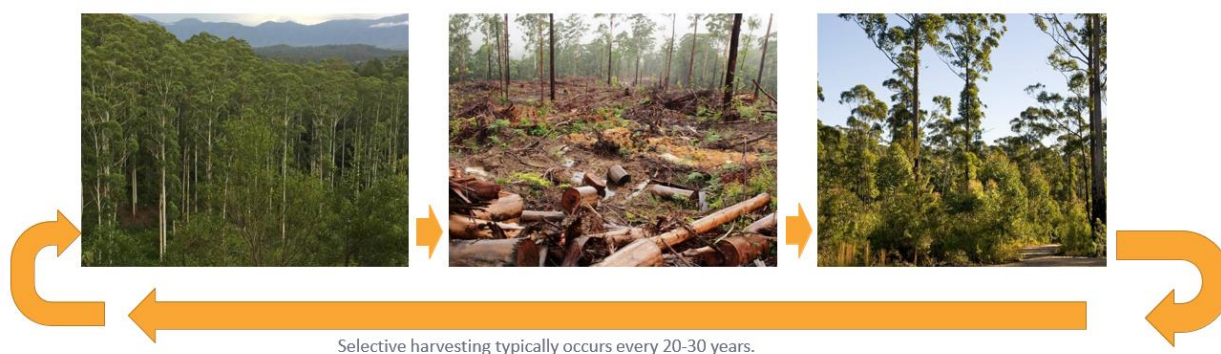
It's incredibly difficult to understand just as that protest series is highly emotional, this is incredibly confusing and all this is trying to do is say hey look we only take 12% and you go 12% of what. There is no way what are there 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 plus the host there are six people struggling to comprehend this. Thanks for the diversion but no

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thanks. I don't know, was the question do you believe it, no I don't believe any, I don't understand it [Greenbelt]

Image 2 - Cycle of forestry

Native forestry image - Image 2



Source: North East Forestry Hub

Participants were shown the above picture which the North East Forestry Hub had provided about the cycle of forestry for hardwood timber. The information the moderator provided about the three images was:

- The three images are trying to show the cycle of forestry for native timber
- A native forest grows for about 20 - 30 years
- When it is ready it is harvested. The middle picture shows what a harvested forest looks like
- The third photo is a forest is a picture of a forest that is about ten years old

The range of responses from participants were positive, negative and unsure. There was also a discussion in many groups around the confusion the images created among participants.

Positive responses

The participants who responded positively to these images appreciated the intention of trying to demonstrate how native forestry works. They appreciated the honesty about what a harvest looks like and then how a forest responds. These participants were not concerned the photos were not taken in the same place.

The positive feedback about the series of images is:

- The images show the cyclical nature of native forestry harvesting. For these participants, this is how forestry operates, the trees are part of a program of harvesting and the images represent exactly the process. They are fully supportive of the process

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That's the system I have always seen. I can only come at it with my own upbringing but what you see on screen now is basically the plan I've always seen. Where people are just stripping and not replanting then its fines and jail time. I believe the Australian Government wouldn't be as harsh as a Canadian but what you see on screen is the way it's meant to work [Sydney]

Aren't they planted for that reason, to be harvested. I don't see a problem with it personally [Newcastle]

They grow it, they cut it, they grow it, they cut it. It's a constant cycle [Greenbelt]

I think this is, as I said, it's the devil's advocate, we have to have wood. There has to be a way of doing it. To me this looks like quite a good way of doing it [Forestry]

- Other participants understand the cycle and are accepting of it, but they would like to have a better understanding and explanation if this is a sustainable process

As long as they are replacing it with what they're taking

But to me this picture is just showing that it is every 20 to 30 years at the end you get some sort of regrowth whether that's sustainable or not though or whether it is just continuously gradually diminishing over time, I don't know enough. But to me that image is just saying its hey guys it's a cycle it connects sustainable it's all good [Greenbelt]

- The length of time it takes to re-grow a forest is a surprise for some. They did not realise as much time is invested in allowing the trees to re-grow to a size where they are thought to be suitable for harvesting

I suppose I'm a little bit surprised in the 20-30 years as well it's like a good plan to me [Lower Hunter]

- The length of time it takes to re-grow a harvested area is additionally interesting to some participants due to the long-term planning and projected needs of timber into the future. There are few industries that have to consider the needs of the population in 25 years' time

Pretty comfortable with it but I do have to admit their turnaround of 20 to 30 years I thought it was like 10 so knowing that it's that long the idea that for any industry you have to once you're doing your replant start thinking well how much demand will we need to anticipate in about a quarter of a century that's a lot of long term planning [Tablelands]

- One of the main concerns of forestry is the practice of clear felling. These images were positive for some participants as it demonstrates native forestry does not use the clear felling approach

Yeah I think that's like the perfect system in theory, like I said before in the previous slide where it looked like they just took and they didn't plant anything they planted something so that model or if put into place is sustainable like we do need timber, we're going to have to take it from somewhere as long as they plant it to replace it. I think go for it [Sydney]

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- Some participants appreciate there is a plan in place when it comes to harvesting native trees. This gives them confidence the industry does have rules about where and when trees can be harvested. It is not a random process but a managed and organised approach

It looks pretty respectable, in the sense that, you were saying the parameters that they have set. They can't harvest it and there are probably laws where they can't harvest it once it's below a certain age. From the looks of that they have got it planned out and under regiment [North Coast]

- Selective harvesting is a new concept for most people. As to be expected, many participants have limited knowledge of the native forestry industry and had given it little thought before these focus groups. To know there is a concept called selective harvesting that does not look like a clear fell is appealing and provides them with confidence in the industry

I much prefer the selective harvesting method, that's something that I do prefer. I like to see something left, not completely decimated then there is something to grow back even if it's just the undergrowth. I much prefer your selective harvesting [Forestry]

- A few participants discussed their confidence in forestry and how the areas are managed. They rationalised that those involved in this industry must want to look after the forest because they need the forests to be continuous for their livelihood

Isn't it in their best interest to look after it anyway because then we won't have it to harvest. If they're reaping it too much [Lower Hunter]

Negative responses

Not all participants were impressed with the images they were presented. Some participants felt this information was untrue and based their reaction on the fact the photos were not taken in the same place over a period of 30+ years. Others feel that animals will still be killed which is unacceptable. There is sadness that the forest has been left untouched for a considerable period of time only to be again 'destroyed'.

- This process is considered by some as a threat to the ecosystem. Their objection is over the 30+ year period, the area will have developed ecologically. To log it feels negative and disruptive and they feel damaging to the ecology of that area

I had the initial thought of farming where it's seasonal. You have pre-season and then it's a year or two and you grow it and go again. But 20 to 30 years surely your ecosystem will start to evolve or spread in there. Being torn down after that seems a bit, not great for the area [Newcastle]

- The disruption of animal habitats and the possibility that animals might be killed in the process is deeply upsetting for some participants. They feel that over the growth period of a forest many animals and habitats will have settled and their homes will be ruined. There is concern for the koalas as well as other wildlife

You can't have the picture in the middle and say no animal was harmed in the felling of those trees because obviously over a period of 20 or 30 years even if it's an

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artificially planted plantation it becomes home for wild diversity of wildlife. When they come in whether its selective logging or whatever because of their machinery and the number of trees that they take they clearly disturb the environment to a huge extent, it takes 30 years to get back to where it was [Sydney]

The little picture tries to romanticise but they haven't done too much damage because it shows a lot of eucalypts in the background. It shows you a lot of messed carnage. How long have these photographs been taken after the felling, it's quite a bit of growth growing back in and around it. What's happened to the animals that would have been there initially, where have they had to go. Were there koalas and wallabies in that area, if there are no studies done on the impact on the flora and fauna it's just specifically just the forestry operation [Sydney]

Going back to xxx point how many animals are harmed or killed in this instance and then it takes another 20 or 30 years to get these animals back and living their life then all of a sudden we're doing the harvesting all over again, so we're basically killing these animals off again and then it is almost like a regurgitation if you will, like it just keeps happening and happening and happening. It's quite disturbing actually [Sydney]

- The concept of replanting, or rejuvenation, is not enough for a few participants. For these people, their concept of a forest is that it should always be pristine. Forestry is an invasion and it does not allow for the forest that is harvested to ever get back to its pristine state

I think that they've got the right idea but where they've done the selective logging, are they selecting those who can have small mosses still regrow and like I said in the first place when they do selective logging as well as clear fell they are only replanting harvesting trees, they are not replanting the smaller native bush that they don't want to log again. If they go across and rejuvenate it, it would probably be a better word. If they rejuvenate the forest in its glory of what it was prior fine, but they are not actually doing that. What they are actually doing is only planting harvesting trees again. It's a bit of a misleading thing [Forestry]

- There were a few participants and only in two of the focus groups who simply did not believe these photos. Their biggest problem is the photo is not taken in the same spot and by it not being a genuine sequence, this is enough for them to not only disbelieve the concept but it actively demonstrates government agencies are lying or trying to trick or dupe them

I'm thinking I don't trust it. Can I see the photo from 20 years ago to the one today in the same area where they logged, it has regrown like that. I don't trust it [North Coast]

These have not been planted here on the left these are some of the tallest trees in Australia they're white ash I think and they only grow in a select area they're stunning. And this one in the middle there is none of that there but it's like there is something trying pull the wool over our eyes here I think [Greenbelt]

I think if you are going to have a little slide like this and you've been doing this for how many years like doing forestry or whatever, none of these photos look like they are from the same place for starters. Like xxxx said, the trees they're different

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species by the looks of it and this last photo doesn't look like just planted trees, it just looks like a bit of a forest with some understory trees that have just grown through and a bit of older growth there too, it just doesn't make sense [Greenbelt]

Unsure

Consistent with other images that were shown, there is a group of participants who find it difficult to form a strong opinion about what they have been shown. The main concerns are for the welfare of the animals and ideally they would like to be reassured consideration has been given for their welfare. Additionally, some would like to know how the areas are chosen, how it is decided how much harvesting will take place, if this process is endorsed by other agencies that look after forests (such as the National Parks and Wildlife) and lastly, if images are going to be shown, for some people to feel reassured they need to be of the same place.

- The reoccurring theme that troubles many participants about forestry is the impact it has on animals and their habitats as well as the fauna and flora. If harvesting is to take place, is there consideration about where and how easily the animals can move to safety

I guess I'm trying to picture the bigger picture of the forest on the left being decimated but wanting to be able to see an area behind that that hasn't been, so there is a place for the animals to go [Sydney]

- Most participants assume there has to be a process of selection of the areas that are going to be harvested, even those who are less positive about forestry. Despite feeling it is unlikely there is no planning process in place, there are participants who would feel reassured if they understood the following:
 - Impact studies before a harvest
 - There are studies that are undertaken to assess damage after the harvest
 - Are areas cleared even if they have unsuitable trees

I would have thought they would have to do some sort of studies into the area to work out what the various flora and fauna that has been damaged or removed because obviously some trees feed off other trees as well. I would have thought that they would have to do some sort of studies into the area to see what damage they're doing in the first place to make sure it's feasible or not [Newcastle]

I'd like to know more about whether they do studies and research the area to see the impact it is going to make or whether they just turn around say, today it is area 17D and that's what we're cutting down. I think that sort of information would make me feel possibly better about the process and the cycle it goes through [Newcastle]

I would wonder just because it's reserved how much is actually on it, how many trees are in there and are they actually getting looked after or is it just the best place. Technically it's reserved but there is nothing on it anyway [Lower Hunter]

- The size and extent of the area that is harvested is important for some participants. Is it a massive area, small or somewhere in between. An aerial photo that shows the section taken out and what remains on either side would be interesting to some participants

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If you have a whole lot of cow paddocks and you move your cows to one paddock and they eat up all the grass but your others are starting to flourish like I'd love to see the bigger picture. That there's only so much taken out of one area but there is another area adjacent to it that is still growing that is still huge so not everything is lost in the area at once [Lower Hunter]

- There is a hesitancy to believe a government agency. Some participants believe they have been misled in the past and are wary of most information given to them. For these participants having an organisation they trust verify and support the concept of selective harvesting will help them have more confidence in this process

They really need to get some National Parks people animal preservation specialists onboard to satisfy the general public they're minimising the degradation [Sydney]

- The difficulty for some participants in these focus groups is the lack of consistency between the photos. Some participants held a stronger opinion, but others simply would like the reassurance and photos are a good way of demonstrate this

The notion is that the first image is the forest the second image if it was taken from exactly the same angle as the first and you wanted to tell me that you were selectively harvesting i.e. not taking everything then I'd see the image on the left with less even say 80% less trees. And your last image would be taken again from the same position and you would show a variation of height of things over the last few years where that was now regrowing back right, which is kind of what Ariel is saying to you, just took the same shot at the beginning, middle and the end. You'd actually show us here I feel like I'm being duped because they're not the same like there is a road in the one at the end [Greenbelt]

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13.2 Quantitative research

13.2.1 Harvesting in State forests overview

Research participants were asked a series of questions about native timber harvesting in State forests. To answer these questions it was important to establish that State forests were different to National Parks and where native timber could be harvested. There is a balance in asking questions and informing research participants about the topic. This was done with neutral language so there is no bias from the way information is presented.

13.2.2 State forests and National Parks

Table 26: Q15 Aware of National Parks and State forests

Base: 2,200

	%
National Parks	92
State forests	73
Neither of these	5

Base: all research participants (weighted)

Almost all (92%) were aware of National Parks but less than three-quarters (73%) were aware of State forests.

The concept of a National Park is well understood but State forests are less well known.

Table 27: Q15 Aware of National Parks and State forests

Base: 2,200

	NET	Sydney metropolitan area	Blue Mountains	Central Coast	Richmond - Tweed	Coffs Harbour - Grafton	Mid North Coast	Hunter Valley - excluding Newcastle	Newcastle and Lake Macquarie
National Parks	92	91	100	94	94	98	97	93	87
State forests	73	69	81	84	85	88	94	82	85
Neither of these	5	5	0	4	5	1	2	5	3

Base: all research participants (weighted)

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Question: *Are you aware of...*

Awareness of State forests is lower for residents of the Sydney Metropolitan area (69%). State forests awareness is higher all North East Region areas.

13.2.3 Awareness of where hardwood can be harvested

To understand hardwood harvesting, research participants were asked where they felt hardwood could be harvested.

An introduction to the section was included in the survey which stated “*We would now like to ask some questions about timber harvesting also known as ‘logging’.*”

Hardwood harvesting occurs in native forests on public State forests and private land. We are going to focus on harvesting in State forests.”

Table 28: Q16 Where hardwood can be harvested

Base: 2,200

	%
State forests	44
Private land	37
Not aware where hardwood can be harvested	45

Base: all research participants (weighted)

Question: *Before now were you aware that harvesting hardwood timber can take place on native forests on...*

Almost half (45%) were not aware of the location hardwood timber could be harvested. Both State forests and private land are correct answers.

Almost half (44%) stated they were aware that native hardwood could be harvested in State Forests.

Table 29: Q16 Where native hardwood can be harvested

Base: 2,200

	NET	Greater Sydney	North East Region
State forests	44	42	52
Private land	37	35	45
Not aware where hardwood can be harvested	45	47	37

Base: all research participants (weighted)

Harvesting in State forests

Those who live outside Greater Sydney are only slightly more likely to know that native hardwood can be harvested in State forests (52%) compared to Greater Sydney (42%).

Some North East Region areas were higher for understanding that native timber harvesting takes place in State forests.

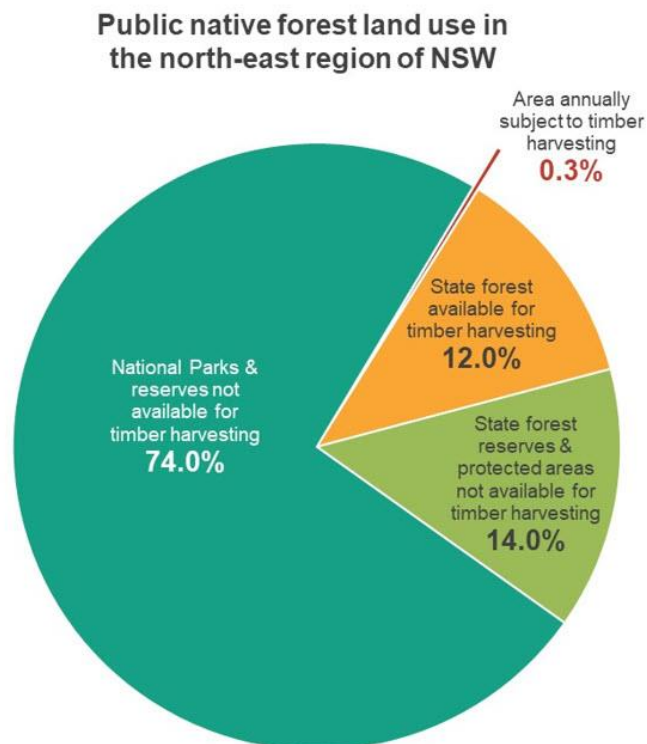
- Coffs Harbour-Grafton - 64%
- Mid-North Coast - 62%
- Newcastle - Lake Macquarie - 52%

Overall there is limited understanding that native timber harvesting can take place in State forests. This includes areas where there is higher awareness of State forests.

13.2.4 Area harvested each year in State forests

We further informed research participants about native timber harvesting in State forests with the following text and diagram. This was included to ensure clarity in further questions.

“Of the publicly owned native forests in North East NSW 12% is available for producing hardwood timber and 88% is protected in conservation reserves. In any given year less than half of one percent (0.3%) of the publicly owned native forests in North East NSW are selectively harvested.”



Research participants were then asked whether this was more or less than expected.

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Table 30: Q17 More or less area than expected for native timber harvesting Base: 2,200

	%
Much less than expected	16
Less than expected	25
About what expected	37
More than expected	17
Much more than expected	5

Base: all research participants (weighted)

Just over two-in-five (41%) felt this was less than expected (much less 16% / less 25%) while thirty-seven percent (37%) felt it was 'about what expected'.

Just over one-in-five (22%) felt it was more than expected (more than expected 17%) / much more 5%).

Overall seventy-eight percent (78%) felt that the amount of native timber harvesting in State forests was about what expected or less than expected.

The findings show that the amount of native timber harvesting is mostly within the expectations of residents of Greater Sydney and the North East Region.

Table 31: Q17 More or less are than expected for native timber harvesting Base: 2,200

	NET	Greater Sydney	North East Region
Much less than expected	16	15	20
Less than expected	25	24	29
About what expected	37	38	33
More than expected	17	17	15
Much more than expected	5	6	3

Base: all research participants (weighted).

Given that there is better understanding of State forests and native timber harvesting in the North East Region it is perhaps surprising that almost half (49%) felt that the area harvested was either less or 'much less' than expected. This compares to Greater Sydney residents, where forty percent (40%) felt the area harvested was less or 'much less' than expected.

The only difference by North East Region residents is for those in Coffs Harbour-Grafton, where twenty seven percent (27%) felt that the area harvested was 'much less' than expected.

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Residents in the heartland of native timber harvesting are more likely to believe that more area is harvested than is actually the case.

13.2.5 Impact of native timber harvesting on forests

Research participants were given the following introduction and shown three images for pre-harvest, immediate post-harvest and forest seven years post-harvest. This was to understand the reaction to the harvest process and regeneration.

Care was taken to make sure that the stimulus photography was realistic and accurately showed the harvesting process and regeneration. We were unable to find images of the same location for this.

The introduction text was:

“We will now show you an example of the native timber selective harvesting process.

Note: the exact location of each example is different.”

The images used are on the next page. Each image was one page in the online questionnaire to make sure that each was clearly visible.

Harvesting in State forests



Forest before harvest



Forest after harvest



Forest seven years after harvest

Harvesting in State forests

Table 32: Q19 Reaction to native timber harvesting stimulus

Base: 2,200

	%
Reassuring there is a process in place	36
Explains the cycle well	34
Animals will be harmed	34
The environment is fundamentally changed	30
This makes me feel better about hardwood harvesting	26
This is new information	23
It can't grow back	9
I do not believe this	7
Other	1
Don't know / no opinion	7

Base: all research participants (weighted)

Reaction to the stimulus was mixed, with both positive and negative outcomes.

Over one-third (36%) were reassured there was a process in place and thirty-four percent (34%) felt that it 'explains the cycle well'. Just over one-quarter (26%) felt better about hardwood harvesting.

Not all responses were positive, with thirty-four percent (34%) feeling that 'animals will be harmed' and thirty percent (30%) that the environment is fundamentally changed. Nine percent (9%) felt that the forest 'can't grow back' and seven percent (7%) did not believe the images for the cycle showing regeneration.

There were few differences by region:

- North East Region residents were more likely to be reassured that a process is in place (42%) than Greater Sydney residents (35%)
- Coffs Harbour-Grafton were more likely to
 - Feel better that there is a process in place - 48%
 - Feel better about native hardwood harvesting - 36%
- Both Central Coast and Richmond-Tweed residents were more likely to believe that animals will be harmed
 - Central Coast - 45%
 - Richmond-Tweed - 44%

There are two key insights that come from these responses. The first is that once people understand there is a cycle and forest regeneration takes place they are more supportive of the native timber harvesting process.

Harvesting in State forests

The second is that the biggest concerns that needs to be addressed in the native timber harvesting cycle are that animals will be harmed in the process of harvesting and that the environment is fundamentally changed.

The inability to find images of native forest harvesting taken in the same location to demonstrate the cycle shows that there is a need for better education materials. It is not surprising that some research participants did not believe the images for the cycle given they were shown three different locations. The industry should document the cycle with better imagery showing locations as they progress through the harvesting cycle.

The harvesting cycle needs better explanation, support and information showing the care taken with animal habitat and regeneration.

13.3 Native timber harvesting concerns and benefits

13.3.1 Quantitative harvesting in State forests conclusion

There is lower awareness of State forests and native timber harvesting in State forests. Less than half of all residents know that native timber harvesting takes place in State forests. Just over half of residents of the North East Region know that harvesting takes place in State forests.

For most people the area harvested was less than they expected but and a minority thought that the area harvested was more than expected. These people often play a significant role in communicating the anti-native timber harvesting opinion.

The lack of knowledge that harvesting takes place in State forests is a problem for public support for the industry. Without understanding that harvesting in State forests takes place and the amount of area that is harvested it is difficult to reach a conclusion whether to support the industry or not support the industry.

When shown the harvesting cycle many were reassured a process was in place, the cycle was explained well and it made some feel better about native hardwood harvesting. The biggest concern was that animals will be harmed and the environment is fundamentally changed.

The industry has many positive practices to minimise harm to animals and their habitat. This is not well known and could lead to lack of support for the industry. Additionally it was difficult to obtain images for this section. The native hardwood industry needs better documentation of how the cycle works that shows the same location if it is going to be believed and trusted.

Half (50%) had concerns about the native hardwood industry while almost two-thirds (65%) could see benefits from the industry.

Harvesting in State forests

Regardless of whether research participants had concerns or could see benefits they were shown a list of concerns and benefits.

The key concerns for all are destruction of animal and koala habitat and the effect on biodiversity. The native forest harvesting industry has a positive story to tell with its thorough management of the impact of harvesting that minimises if not eliminates any damage to wildlife and koalas. This is not widely known and needs to be communicated.

The benefit of native timber hardwood harvesting can be summed up as:

- Economic
 - Provide regional jobs
 - Supports regional economies
- Reliance on Australian timber
 - Use of best practice harvesting
 - Not importing hardwood from overseas unsustainable sources
 - Reduced costs
 - Continuity of supply

In the context of general concerns which are the cost of living and the cost of housing, the benefits of continued employment and the regional economy makes a clear connection.

As found in the qualitative research, few wish to import hardwood from other countries. This is for a range of reasons including costs and avoiding jurisdictions where environmental standards are poor or non-existent.

13.3.2 Concerns and benefits overview

Research participants were asked about any concerns they had about native forest harvesting and then benefits they could see. Concerns and benefits came from the qualitative research.

At this stage in the survey they had information on the amount of native forest harvested each year and seen images of the harvesting process.

13.3.3 Native forest harvesting concerns

Table 33: Q20 Have concerns about harvesting

Base: 2,200

	%
Yes	50
No	50

Base: all research participants (weighted)

Harvesting in State forests

Question: “Do you have any concerns about hardwood harvesting in native State forests in NSW?”

Half (50%) have concerns about hardwood harvesting in native State forests in NSW.

There is no difference by region with the exception of Hunter Valley where only forty-two percent (42%) have concerns.

Table 34: Q21 Concerns about native forest harvesting

Base: 2,200

	%
Destruction of animal habitat	54
Destruction of koala habitat	53
Effect on biodiversity (native plant and animal life)	41
Soil erosion	31
We are clearing too much land	31
Old growth trees are cut down	31
Lack of regeneration	30
Damage to retained trees	27
Changes to species mix	23
We send our wood overseas	22
Forests should not be used for profit	20
Increased bushfire risk	19
Poor utilisation of forests	15
Breaching of operating rules	15
Unprofitable industry	6
Other concern	1
I do not have any concerns about hardwood forestry in native forests	12

Base: all research participants (weighted)

Question: “Which of these concerns about hardwood harvesting in native State forests in NSW do you agree with?”

Regardless of whether research participants had concerns about native timber harvesting or not they were all asked this question.

When presented with this list only twelve percent (12%) did not have any concerns about native forest harvesting. This was a ‘single select’ response which means that no other concerns could be chosen.

Harvesting in State forests

The biggest concerns are ‘destruction of animal habitat’ (54%) and ‘destruction of koala habitat’ (53%). This is followed by the effect on biodiversity.

Some of the lowest concerns are informative. Despite currency for those who wish to close the industry, both ‘breaching of operating rules’ (15%) and ‘unprofitable industry’ (6%) are the two lowest concerns.

The ‘top three’ concerns all related to animal welfare and habitat in harvesting forests. As the qualitative findings show these are considered when selecting trees to harvest but without any information on this process the assumption is that the animals will be impacted by harvesting.

Table 35: Q21 Concerns about native forest harvesting

Base: 2,200

Column %	NET	Yes (have concerns)	No (no concerns)
Destruction of animal habitat	54	68	40
Destruction of koala habitat	53	64	42
Effect on biodiversity (native plant and animal life)	41	56	26
Soil erosion	31	41	21
We are clearing too much land	31	46	16
Old growth trees are cut down	31	44	18
Lack of regeneration	30	41	19
Damage to retained trees	27	39	15
Changes to species mix	23	35	11
We send our wood overseas	22	25	19
Forests should not be used for profit	20	30	9
Increased bushfire risk	19	24	13
Poor utilisation of forests	15	22	8
Breaching of operating rules	15	22	8
Unprofitable industry	6	9	3
Other concern	1	1	1
I do not have any concerns about hardwood forestry in native forests	12	1	22

Base: all research participants (weighted)

The table above shows the answers by those who had concerns prior to answering the question (50%) and those who had no concerns (50%).

Harvesting in State forests

Not surprisingly those who had concerns are higher in all concerns, while those who had no concerns are lower for all issues. The two groups generally have the same order from highest to lowest concern with the exception of the belief that ‘forests should not be used for profit’ (30% for previously having concerns / 9% of no previous concerns).

Of those with no previous concerns over one-in-five (22%) do not have any concerns with native forest hardwood harvesting. This option was a ‘single response’ so no others could be selected.

The ‘top three’ concerns for both groups relate to animal welfare and habitat. For those with no previous concerns most other issues are relatively minor.

This analysis shows that not matter whether residents have concerns about native hardwood harvesting or do not have concerns, both groups’ primary concern is animal welfare.

Table 36: Q21 Concerns about native hardwood harvesting

Base: 2,200

	NET	Greater Sydney	North East Region
Destruction of animal habitat	54	53	60
Destruction of koala habitat	53	51	59
Effect on biodiversity (native plant and animal life)	41	40	43
Soil erosion	31	31	32
We are clearing too much land	31	30	33
Old growth trees are cut down	31	30	32
Lack of regeneration	30	30	29
Damage to retained trees	27	27	25
Changes to species mix	23	23	22
We send our wood overseas	22	21	27
Forests should not be used for profit	20	21	16
Increased bushfire risk	19	19	16
Poor utilisation of forests	15	16	13
Breaching of operating rules	15	15	14
Unprofitable industry	6	7	4
Other concern	1	1	1
I do not have any concerns about hardwood forestry in native forests	12	12	13

Base: all research participants (weighted)

Harvesting in State forests

Analysis by Greater Sydney area and North East Region shows relatively few differences overall but includes some that may not be expected.

Both groups of residents are similar in their top concerns being ‘destruction of animal habitat’ and ‘destruction of koala habitat’ but this is higher for those in the North East Region.

North East Region residents are more likely to be concerned that ‘we send our wood overseas’ (27%) than residents of Greater Sydney (21%).

There is less concern for North East Region residents that ‘forests should not be used for profit’ (16%) than Greater Sydney residents (21%) and also ‘increased bushfire risk’ (16% North East Region / 19% Greater Sydney).

Table 37: Q21 Concerns about native hardwood harvesting

Base: 2,200

	NET	Sydney metropolitan area	Blue Mountains	Central Coast	Richmond - Tweed	Coffs Harbour - Grafton	Mid North Coast	Hunter Valley - excluding Newcastle	Newcastle and Lake Macquarie
Destruction of animal habitat	54	52	63	61	67	54	63	60	56
Destruction of koala habitat	53	50	63	61	63	54	64	61	54
Effect on biodiversity (native plant and animal life)	41	39	50	55	52	41	48	38	38
Soil erosion	31	30	38	40	36	28	35	28	31
We are clearing too much land	31	29	44	43	33	34	33	30	34
Old growth trees are cut down	31	29	50	43	38	33	32	27	31
Lack of regeneration	30	30	19	34	35	30	30	27	25
Damage to retained trees	27	26	25	42	29	23	25	21	26
Changes to species mix	23	22	25	37	21	25	25	17	23

Harvesting in State forests

	NET	Sydney metropolitan area	Blue Mountains	Central Coast	Richmond - Tweed	Coffs Harbour - Grafton	Mid North Coast	Hunter Valley - excluding Newcastle	Newcastle and Lake Macquarie
We send our wood overseas	22	20	25	30	30	32	28	27	21
Forests should not be used for profit	20	20	13	36	19	16	12	17	17
Increased bushfire risk	19	19	31	25	17	18	14	17	15
Poor utilisation of forests	15	15	6	21	13	20	14	10	11
Breaching of operating rules	15	15	0	18	15	9	19	16	13
Unprofitable industry	6	7	0	10	5	4	3	1	5
Other concern	1	1	0	3	1	1	1	1	1
I do not have any concerns about hardwood forestry in native forests	12	11	6	13	9	22	16	13	11

Base: all research participants (weighted)

There are some variations by smaller geographic regions.

‘We send out wood overseas’ is a bigger concern for residents of Richmond - Tweed, Coffs Harbour - Grafton, Mid-North Coast but less of a concern for residents of the Sydney Metropolitan area.

13.3.4 Native forest harvesting benefits

Research participants were asked “Do you believe there are positive outcomes from hardwood harvesting in native State forests in NSW?”

Harvesting in State forests

Table 38: Q22 Positive outcomes from native forest harvesting

Base: 2,200

	%
Yes	65
No	35

Base: all research participants (weighted)

Question: “Do you believe there are positive outcomes from hardwood harvesting in native State forests in NSW?”

Almost two-thirds (65%) see positive outcomes from native forest harvesting. This is fifteen percent (15%) higher than those who have concerns.

Unlike those with concerns, there is no statistically significant difference by any area with the exception of Mid-North Coast, where seventy one percent (71%) see positive outcomes from native hardwood harvesting.

Table 39: Q23 Positive outcomes from native hardwood harvesting

Base: 2,200

	%
Helps rural employment	38
We should use Australian timber	38
Produces timber that is needed in our homes and public infrastructure	37
Supports regional economies	37
Renewable product that is produced naturally	34
Hardwood is ethically sourced rather than imported from unsustainable sources	32
Helps manage forests	32
Keeps Australia independent	32
Reduces use of plastic	31
It is an essential industry	26
Sustainable industry	26
Keeps cost of building down	25
Reduces reliance on energy intensive products like tiles, concrete and steel	22
Well regulated industry	17
Other positive	1
I do not see any benefits in hardwood harvesting in native State forests in NSW	10

Base: all research participants (weighted)

Harvesting in State forests

Question: “Which of these positive statements about hardwood harvesting in native State forests in NSW do you agree with?”

Only ten percent (10%) do not see any benefits in native hardwood harvesting.

Unlike ‘concerns’ there are no standout positive statements. However there are themes that can be found.

Harvesting ‘helps rural employment’ (38%) and ‘supports regional economies’ (37%) shows the economic importance of the native hardwood industry.

Use of Australian timber (38%) that is ‘ethically sourced rather than imported’ (32%) that also ‘keeps Australia independent’ (32%) shows the importance of a locally sourced and managed industry.

The essential need for timber is seen with the agreement that native timber harvesting ‘produces timber that is needed in our homes and public infrastructure’ (37%).

Table 40: Q23 Positive outcomes from native hardwood harvesting **Base: 2,200**

Column %	NET	Yes (positive outcomes)	No (positive outcomes)
Helps rural employment	38	47	23
We should use Australian timber	38	46	22
Produces timber that is needed in our homes and public infrastructure	37	47	19
Supports regional economies	37	46	20
Renewable product that is produced naturally	34	44	14
Hardwood is ethically sourced rather than imported from unsustainable sources	32	42	15
Helps manage forests	32	41	15
Keeps Australia independent	32	40	17
Reduces use of plastic	31	36	22
It is an essential industry	26	35	10
Sustainable industry	26	34	11
Keeps cost of building down	25	31	16
Reduces reliance on energy intensive products like tiles, concrete and steel	22	28	11
Well regulated industry	17	22	8
Other positive	1	1	0
I do not see any benefits in hardwood harvesting in native State forests in NSW	10	2	26

Base: all research participants (weighted)

Harvesting in State forests

Of the thirty-five percent (35%) who saw no positive outcomes from native hardwood harvesting (Q22) just over one-quarter (26%) did not agree with any of the positive statements. This group have much lower agreement with any positive statement than those who see positive outcomes from native hardwood harvesting.

Table 41: Q23 Positive outcomes from native hardwood harvesting **Base: 2,200**

	NET	Greater Sydney	North East Region
Helps rural employment	38	37	42
We should use Australian timber	38	34	50
Produces timber that is needed in our homes and public infrastructure	37	36	43
Supports regional economies	37	36	40
Renewable product that is produced naturally	34	33	37
Hardwood is ethically sourced rather than imported from unsustainable sources	32	31	40
Helps manage forests	32	32	30
Keeps Australia independent	32	31	36
Reduces use of plastic	31	30	34
It is an essential industry	26	25	30
Sustainable industry	26	26	26
Keeps cost of building down	25	25	25
Reduces reliance on energy intensive products like tiles, concrete and steel	22	21	23
Well regulated industry	17	16	18
Other positive	1	0	1
I do not see any benefits in hardwood harvesting in native State forests in NSW	10	10	11

Base: all research participants (weighted)

North East Region residents are far more likely to see positive outcomes from native hardwood harvesting than residents of Greater Sydney. This group have much higher agreement that we should ‘use Australian timber’ (50%), that Australian hardwood is ‘ethically sourced rather than important from unsustainable sources’ (40%) and that that ‘keeps Australia independent’ (36%).

North East Region residents also see the economic benefits with higher agreement that the industry ‘helps rural employment’ (42%) and ‘supports regional economies’ (40%).

14 Information sources

14.1 Qualitative research

14.1.1 Qualitative summary

Participants were asked to think about the information sources.

The discussion in all focus groups was similar; participants are struggling to find reliable factual news sources they are comfortable reading. In the groups there was a consistent discussion where many feel the current style of journalism is not always honest and promotes emotion over fact.

There are many options available but it appeared that most people have their favourite ones and very few people 'fact checked' by using multiple sources. Social media is either loathed or seen as the 'truth-teller'.

There was a range of information sources people will use if they were to find out information about forestry. Government departments many believe are credible sources of information unless of course the participant in anti-forestry and more specifically antigovernment. There is a strong sense of distrust in all information options available ,which leaves people feeling despondent or disinterested.

Where I'm relying on people to tell me the truth it really is Government and if you're telling me that the forestry if the forestry commission or whatever they're called is an arm of Government and that's the level of communication they're using, I just went no, so I'm more likely to go back to somebody else who is probably on the other side of that argument to say what have you got and then it is just up to us to go between these two extremes. It's very tiring I must say it's very exhausting and then I'm like not caring and just stick with my confirmation bias which is whatever I thought I believe if I continue to believe [Greenbelt]

The difficulty of changing or swaying the opinion of an individual is opinions are formed based on the information they choose to read and shifting them from that position is challenging.

14.1.2 Information disappointment

Real or fake

Many participants are disappointed with the current quality of information sources available to them. Many discuss their inability to determine the difference between 'fake' or 'real' news. The uncertainty comes from the way the media might report their stories. There is a feeling the media will intentionally embellish or slant a story rather than report on the topic in a well-rounded way.

Information sources

Maybe to my point before what I was talking about the media and fake news; obviously a lot of it comes from the media we rely on other people to report us facts. So can those facts be misinterpreted, can they be slanted in a certain way to tell a certain story absolutely and that was my point before as well, what are facts [Sydney]

who is doing the fact checking who are we relying on to tell us and say what the truth is because we rely on media outlets to tell us what we think is the truth but we all know they all have their own slant I don't even mean politically but they all want to tell a juicy story so they are all going to come at it from an angle that is going to tell a story rather than, no one wants to hear a boring story on how well everything is going [Sydney]

Poor standards

The media is not comprehensive and those who are genuinely interested in the news reported having to sift through multiple sources in order to come to a place where they feel they can form an opinion. These participants feel there is a lot of reading to be done for a firm and contemplated opinion to be formed

The only way you can read the information is get it from multiple sources and through that through analysis come to a view as to what is likely to be true. I think there has been a degradation in journalistic standards over the past 30 or 40 years [Sydney]

Ownership influences

Some participants believe the owners of various media outlets, such as the Murdochs and Kerry Stokes will influence the style of their media outlets. Some people are distrustful of these people (and their organisations) and therefore are dismissive of the information they report.

One participant feels the media outlets have to pander to the advertisers who spend money with their media outlet. These participants, when they are reading or watching a news source, find themselves questioning what the motivation for this piece of information and why is it being presented in the way that it is. This means they lack trust in the information and the outlet that they are engaging with

As far as the media goes, I don't trust it because Murdoch owns most of the press in Australia, 80% of the newspapers or something like that. Channel 7 is owned by Kerry Stokes, the richest landowner. I tend to look things up myself [North Coast]

So much of their income is determined by larger advertisers. The distance between what might have been editorial and what might have been news and what might also be positioned as an advert on the next page, gets a little bit blurred. They don't want to publish things that puts advertisers offside or encourages readership of those advertisers they don't like or aren't going to be purchasing from them. [North Coast]

Information sources

Media create news

Some participants in the North Coast focus groups believe the media is often responsible for creating news and because of their experiences are distrustful of the information being presented.

In this group they discussed how they have experienced activists or protestors arriving in the area where they are live along with a media team. These events do not include locals and nor do locals agree with what they are saying or protesting against. They find this type of 'news' disturbing and irritating and it again erodes their confidence in the media.

I will say that the media does skew the truth as well. I know from the farm I was talking about in the mountains, we have had some activist types come up there and they schedule their protests and that's when the media comes. We've had that place up there for 15 years and it has done just fine without them. I do think the media drums up a lot [North Coast]

Then you've got these blow-ins that are coming in and giving you all the newest talking points from all these global, the climate change experts, giving you all these tips that are from them. Then you've got these old school men and women saying, no that's not how we run our land, we've done it successfully for multiple generations, listen to us, they're just arrogant and they say no. Who do you see on television, you see these blow-ins [North Coast]

Social media

Social media is either ridiculed or thought to be the only avenue of truthful information where people can speak the truth and not be curtailed by outside influences.

Those who are disparaging about social media feel people can say anything without having to support their words with any facts.

Others feel it is a viable source and have read or seen information that is truthful but because it is controversial will not be seen in mainstream media.

Anybody can post anything online anybody can say anything, anybody can have baseless facts, its up to you to just figure out which is actually correct and which is just bull [Sydney]

The protestors and their pictures show you what is really happening. The first lot of slides where we were all devastated, that's probably the truth. I would say that is the truth. How do we get our information now these days, from alternative media and social media, from people on the ground, not people in offices [North coast]

14.1.3 Forestry information sources

Participants were asked where they would go to find out information about forestry in NSW. Often there is no one particular source, but a selection of sources that are available. As one participant described:

I've got all extremes, I've got neighbours that are totally "greenies" and chain themselves to bulldozers, I'd be looking at the whole gambit, I'd be talking to them, talking to the government and the forestry and just making an educated decision after that [Forestry]

The sources they would turn to for information are as follows:

Google

Google is often the first place a participant would look. They simply put in the information they are after in the search engine and then review the sites that come up. The strategy of many of the participants is to review a few sites that come up in their search and when they start to get consistent information, it is at that point they will feel they can start to form an opinion. They also come to understand what sites they will have more trust in than others.

Google and if you're still unsure, you'd also check forestry people, but I probably wouldn't do that. I would just Google it [Lower Hunter]

I would think of the question I wanted to know and then just ask it directly to Google. I have a habit of just reading the first one or two things that pop up. I feel like if it's more popular and more trusted it's higher up in the search in Google, I wouldn't go to page 5. That plays into my mind often, the things that are top searches are more reliable [Lower Hunter]

I don't think there is any way that you truly know. Even if someone does tell you hard splitting facts you can't just, how do I still know that you're telling the truth. Some of it just comes into trust. When I look up stuff, Google and then a couple of web pages and compare information. If a lot of pages have the same information you just believe that it's true [North Coast]

That's how I do it, I just sit there and Google it and go onto 10 different sites and read everything [North Coast]

The limitation of Google is it can be difficult to determine the 'truth' as there can be so many different points of view.

I'd probably start with Google but I think there is so much misinformation out there now I wouldn't really believe, I don't know if I'd believe whatever I found because I'm sure you could find both sides so knowing which is the truth, that's why I probably wouldn't to be honest look in to it. Because I don't think I'd be able to find the truth [Sydney]

Information sources

Social media

Facebook is an information source for many people and a couple of participants thought they might start using Facebook as a place for finding information. There are Facebook groups and they provide information that some people find useful

I find you can find a lot of information on Facebook as well; because of different groups whether they're based in fact or not but I have to find some of those Facebook groups are interesting places to start a bit of information and a bit of reading, a bit of fact finding even if its just reading something on there and going to Google and finding some light information to know then how to go deeper [Sydney]

Government sites

Government sites are considered a viable source of information by many participants. It is not to say there is complete trust or faith in these sites, but they appear to be offering information that many are prepared to access.

I support places like WWF but sometimes they can overdo it a little bit. I try and stick with the dot org, the independents, the National Trust and places like that. A lot of the government things I read and trust what they say. It's not all the government is bad. I guess you don't know but take the risk that you're getting fed the right information [Lower Hunter]

I got to go with the science as well because I'm assuming that they would be audited for information I think they'd be fairly strict monitoring of it and I think if they were so incorrect then there would be people calling it out [Tablelands]

I'd lean more towards government just off the fence possibly where I feel they would have, this is just me, I didn't know anything before coming in, I feel that they would have to do studies and put a lot of money into this before doing it. Whether they give us all the data back as honest as it is or whether it's skewed, I don't know. I feel maybe their research would be more polished in my opinion [Newcastle]

Member of Parliament (MP)

A few participants thought they might ask their local MP for information as the local MP will have information about the topic they are interested in.

Also, member of parliament, writing to them and asking them what's going on in the area, that would be the only two things I'd look for [Forestry]

Not all participants trust government sites or politicians. There is a level of distrust that is created when opposing sides never hold common ground. Additionally some participants are anti-government and will never trust the information they provide.

Going to some of the Universities and the more neutral things but when it comes to Governments and everything else the Greens will say one thing one would say the other and businesses will say one thing. We just don't know any more do we [Sydney]

Information sources

Never trust the government, never trust a politician [Lower Hunter]

Again, state and federal governments have certainly created that distrust. It makes it difficult to believe [Lower Hunter]

I wouldn't trust the Government [Forestry]

Because they can't lie straight in bed [Forestry]

Australian Bureau of statistics (ABS)

This is not a popular source and was only suggested by one participant. The ABS is a good source of information but its limitation is it is difficult to navigate.

ABS. That's where you'll get the information about this. It is hard to navigate. Hard to find if you're looking for one thing, you've got to spend an hour trying to find it, but you'll get there [North Coast]

ABC - News

The ABC is a news outlet that many participants still have confidence in. The information that is provided is seen by these participants as being the most factually correct and less about opinions that the other news outlets are seen to promote.

I find that ABC are not too bad. They are probably the most factually correct as far as I'm concerned. They marry up with the facts that I've looked up and what they say is pretty much close to that. Quite often the commercial centre will throw something out there just to get the people's opinions going rather than facts, they won't present facts to you. They're just making an opinion [North Coast]

Additional sources

The other sources participants might consider using are:

- 'State forestry'

The State forestry website has pretty much every single thing you told very readily available, they have to it's law they have to tell you how much they cut what they got allocated, where they can get to [Tablelands]

- There are others who do not believe they will trust the information any business associated with forestry will provide

As it was mentioned before, it's a business. The business wants to keep running even if there is any negative impact they're not going to want to have to throw that around. They're going to try and be as positive as possible with it all but because it's a business they may not give you information that they have to [Newcastle]

- National Parks and Wildlife

Information sources

Maybe National Parks and Wildlife, I'm giving them a phone call and saying, hey what information can you give me about forestry and logging, our State forest and things [Forestry]

- Go to the sites and make an assessment

I agree, everyone is very opinionated and all you're going to see is somebody else's point of view. I think it is going to be very difficult to make an educated decision unless you do get to see it [Forestry]

A forestry, I think going to forestry you would get a biased answer as well as going to the protestors or a green side. I'm not sure where to go. The only way is to read it all and then go and have a look if I really wanted to know [Forestry]

- Talk to people in the industry

Always the Government body but its always more interesting to talk to people in the business as well in the field. Because what is supposed to happen doesn't always happen but yeah I don't think we live in a country where you can sneakily cut down half of NSW like you can in the Amazon. There would be legal stuff going on but I just don't think it is as extreme as some poor third world countries like for them unfortunately. And to be fair we saw a few slides in isolation so you can't really draw conclusions from seeing a few slides in isolation as well [Green]

14.2 Quantitative research

14.2.1 Quantitative research summary

The three information sources participants are most likely to use to find out information about hardwood harvesting are:

- 44% - NSW Environmental Protection Agency
- 43% - Forestry Corporation of NSW
- 41% - NSW Department of Primary Industries

The challenge for the native forestry industry is to drive people to these sites for information and also to ensure the information is straightforward and easy to understand.

Table 42: Q24 Reliable information sources for hardwood harvesting Base: 2,200

	%
NSW Environmental Protection Authority	44
Forestry Corporation of NSW	43
NSW Department of Primary Industries	41
NSW Local Land Services	37
State Government	31
Timber NSW	26
People that work in the industry	23
Environmental groups	22
Radio, TV and newspapers	12
Social media including YouTube	9
Friends and family	8
None of these / don't know	13

Base: all research participants (weighted)

Question: *“Which of these groups or organisations do you feel are a reliable source of information if you wanted to learn more about hardwood harvesting in NSW?”*

Given the level of doubt about Government in general found in the qualitative research it is unexpected that Government sources are by far the most trusted sources for reliable information about hardwood harvesting in NSW.

Most reliable is the NSW Environmental Protection Authority (44%), followed by Forestry Corporation of NSW (43%) then NSW Department of Primary Industries (41%).

Information sources

Much less reliable sources are ‘people that work in the industry’ (23%), environmental groups (22%) general media (12%), ‘social media (9%) and ‘friends and family’ (8%).

Table 43: Q24 Reliable information sources about hardwood harvesting **Base: 2,200**

	NET	Greater Sydney	North East Region
NSW Environmental Protection Authority	44	43	48
Forestry Corporation of NSW	43	41	50
NSW Department of Primary Industries	41	40	45
NSW Local Land Services	37	36	42
State Government	31	32	28
Timber NSW	26	25	31
People that work in the industry	23	22	30
Environmental groups	22	23	21
Radio, TV and newspapers	12	13	7
Social media including YouTube	9	9	5
Friends and family	8	8	7
None of these / don't know	13	14	11

Base: all research participants (weighted)

Government agencies are more trusted by residents of the North East Region than those from Greater Sydney. The exception is the State Government, which has higher trust in Greater Sydney (32%) than the North East Region (28%).

While only a small difference, residents of Greater Sydney see general media (13%) as a more reliable source of information than those from the North East Region (7%).

15 Koalas

15.1 Koala overview

Participants were asked to consider if they thought koalas were endangered, under threat or were thriving.

There is a strong support for the concept of koalas being endangered and need protection although not all agree.

Some feel as children they used to see koalas but now they do not. The major threats people feel towards koalas are fires, urbanisation, predatory animals and chlamydia. Native forestry is not viewed as a major threat to koalas.

15.2 Thoughts about koalas

15.2.1 Less koalas

Some participants have strong memories of seeing koalas when they were children in the areas where they lived. They still live in these areas but feel there are far less koalas in the area and these participants cannot remember when they last saw a koala in their local area. They are unsure if there are less of them or if they have simply moved elsewhere.

Growing up in Port we saw them all the time everywhere they would be across the road and I haven't seen one down there for a good 15 years [North Coast]

I know that from my local experience, I would see koalas in the neighbourhood, I don't see koalas in the neighbourhood anymore. You would go on a bushwalk and you would see at least one koala and that doesn't happen anymore [North Coast]

They used to wake us up at nighttime with their growl and I haven't heard it haven't seen them so in my personal experience I think the numbers are diminishing whether or not they just moved on to find somewhere else and I'm just not in that place, I don't know [Tablelands]

15.2.2 More koalas inland

There were a few discussions in the different focus groups about how it is rare to see koalas in the coastal areas, but common to find them inland. Participants feel this has occurred for two reasons, the recent fires affecting the coastal areas and urbanisation. Inland areas and National Parks offer more protection to koalas.

I think it depends on area so some places I think they're far less endangered but if you look say along the coast in some places yes, high levels of human habitation, it endangers their habitat. But when you get to the National Parks on the other hand

where there is a lot more protection I think that their position is much better
[Tablelands]

15.2.3 Level of endangerment for Koalas

There were varying opinions about the level of threat koalas are under. There are some who feel koalas are under immediate threat and base this on their not seeing any koalas and information they have read. Others feel the level of threat is not as extreme as is discussed amongst the public.

- Koalas are under threat

We need to do something, especially after the fires here. I talk to my neighbour who said, I'm the house across the road and then just bush to the beach. You used to be able to sit on the front veranda and see the koalas in the trees, there is just none. I have been living here for 3.5 years and I'm yet to see one and it's pretty much Taree to Old Bar is bush and national park and I have not seen one [Forestry]

Yeah I think they are in threat definitely, we lost a lot of population and maybe they do get a bit more air time compared to other animals but maybe rightly so maybe there's a real reason why they're getting all the air time [Sydney]

- Unsure of threatened status

I was going to say I don't think they are enlisted as endangered I think they're either threatened or the stage just before you get threatened at the moment [Tablelands]

- Koalas can still be found

I've seen more koalas in Walcha than I ever have in Gunnedah, I've never seen one in Gunnedah [Tablelands]

I still see koalas around Forster, not in Forster but around Forster and up at the farm. The farm had a lot before we had the fires a few years ago, they're coming back with the little joeys on their back. It's wonderful to see. When we're talking about trusting news sources, I trust what I see. I think that the areas that I've seen are very well taken care of, our farm and other ones where we put in the effort to keep these animals around. They are plentiful there [North Coast]

The threats to koalas are thought to be:

- Fires

I know the fires devastated a lot; they are now categorised as critically endangered from memory. I know the Port Stephen's area are focusing heavily on a breeding program. I think at the moment you can adopt a koala, not actually take it home
[Lower Hunter]

- Urbanisation
- Animals

Bypasses and all that sort of thing in certain areas. I remember coming home one night, it must have been 3 o'clock in the morning, I heard the dogs barking and I thought what is going on and I looked across the road and there was a koala climbing up a palm tree, not a pine tree but a palm tree. It was obviously scared because of the dogs [North Coast]

- Chlamydia

We have the hospital here and the koalas we had here were different, they were chlamydia free, and they weren't inbred as much. It was really devastating that our koalas got wiped out because they were chlamydia free, and they didn't have the inherit traits of inbreeding [North Coast]

I didn't realise that wow that just came up then, we should be working on getting rid of that, chlamydia because that could be why they're dwindling populations. We're just being distracted by the forestry and the bushfires and not focusing on that as well [Forestry]

- Native forestry - only one participant thought native forestry was the main cause

Chlamydia is a bit of a problem. I think forestry is the biggest danger [Forestry]

15.3 Great Koala National Park

The concept of a koala sanctuary at Coffs Harbour was introduced into the discussion with participants in all groups. Not much is known about the proposed sanctuary so the discussion was an 'in concept' idea and participants were not provided with any other information.

The concept of the sanctuary being a tourism attraction was also introduced after the benefits of a sanctuary had been discussed. Participants were informed that part of the sanctuary was to create 10,000 jobs and they were also asked to comment on that concept.

Participants can see benefits in a sanctuary but there were questions about the role and purpose of the sanctuary. There was universal disbelief the sanctuary could create 10,000 jobs.

15.3.1 Benefits of the Great Koala National Park

The benefits of the koala sanctuary raised by participants are:

Sanctuary concept

The concept of a park was interpreted as a sanctuary. It was viewed as a resource to protect koalas. It is perceived as a hospital service to unwell koalas. They feel it will be similar to what is already available in Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie.

That's what I think of as well. I wouldn't call it a sanctuary what they have at Coffs, it's a sectioned off area and you're not really allowed to go in there at all, they don't even want you walking out there. It's out the back of a hospital area, it's not a very big pocket that they've listed as a sanctuary section. It's not very big and it's not what I thought it was going to be. I thought very much like you, that it would be a rehabilitation centre for koalas [Forestry]

It's a tiny little fenced off area and I don't know if anybody patrols there but what I thought it would be a building and it would be more like a rehabilitation centre, it's not really like what I thought it was going to be at all [Forestry]

Protect unwell koalas

The purpose of the sanctuary is to protect unwell koalas and then release them when they are well.

It would be a protected area; a breeding program and I guess they might release them out into other areas that is protected. That's what I'd imagine a koala sanctuary would do [Forestry]

Offers protection

Koalas are not thought to intelligent, they are under threat and they need protection. The Sanctuary will provide this protection and some participants who have heard about it believe it to be a positive proposition.

I think I've heard of The Great Koala National Park, around Coffs Harbour. I thought it was a terrific idea. I don't know how big it was that was proposed [North Coast]

It sounded grand and hearing that it would be a national park. They are native, they're kind of dumb animals, that they've survived this long is remarkable. They sleep all the time; they find it terribly difficult to mate [North Coast]

I love it I've visited koala sanctuaries before all different areas, Great Ocean Road there's quite a few down there, Noosa QLD etc, etc. I think its really good because it gives them a safe space to be able to grow and be monitored and that's the other thing obviously there is a lot of disease and problems that koalas have as well. And when we're chopping up their habitats that's also part of the problem because they are not having a safe corridor, we're putting roads in we're doing all sorts of things, so for me I think it's a great idea [Sydney]

Act before endangered

Some feel there is benefit in developing plans and policies ahead of time as this is the best way to ensure koalas will not become extinct.

Whether that's the situation or maybe this is a situation where they're saying, let's get there before this does happen and do the right thing and provide them with a

sanctuary which would be an amazing thing. It's great, anything like that is a massive positive [Newcastle]

15.3.2 Great National Koala Park reservations

There were a few reservations about the shape and form a sanctuary would take. Mentioned were:

Clarity of purpose of sanctuary

Some participants discussed how they would like more clarity around what the sanctuary would be trying to achieve. These participants feel the intention of the sanctuary needs to be clear if they are to support the concept. Many want to know if the purpose of the sanctuary is to breed, treat for illnesses or both.

Releasing koalas

There is concern about releasing koalas due to the prevalence of chlamydia and then the ultimate release to ensure they do not become infected again.

Probably is they need that for there is a lot happening with koalas at the moment with all the illnesses they get or whatever and we need to have new breeds of koalas who are not inbred in a sanctuary but maybe they should be released maybe that's the way to do it to backup have some kind of breeding thing and release them if we can find the trees and the areas that they can go to like Gunnedah [Tablelands]

How release of koalas will be managed

A couple of participants referred to examples where the breeding of koalas was mismanaged and resulted in koalas having to be culled. These participants would not like to see the same poor planning occur again.

I'm not sure whether it's a caged in thing for breeding koalas or whether they're getting land and saying, this will never be chopped down because we're going to put koalas there. Now if that's the case then I can't remember where it was, I think it was in Queensland they actually did that, but houses grew up around this sanctuary. What happened the koalas over populated and they couldn't spread out because there was no more native forest for them to go into. They had to actually cull them. You can't move a koala from one place to another, each have different gums that they eat and things like that. I'm not sure whether a koala sanctuary, everywhere should be a koala sanctuary is my opinion [Forestry]

Koalas should not be in captivity

Koalas, when they are in the right environment and safe from their natural opponents such as fire, wildlife and urbanisation are thought to be better living freely than in captivity. The

concept of a sanctuary concerns some participants because it suggests the koalas will not have enough space to roam freely.

If they're going to do this koala sanctuary what are they going to do, go around and pick them all up in a bus and take them to this beautiful place. I'm half-hearted about it. Living in the wild is beautiful [Newcastle]

Hospitals already in place

There is an awareness among some participants that koala hospitals and mini sanctuaries are already in place and these participants are wondering why there needs to be another one in Coffs Harbour. Port Stephens and Port Macquarie were mentioned as towns that has koala rehabilitation services. There was uncertainty as to why another one needs to be built.

I know the Port Stephen's area are focusing heavily on a breeding program. I think at the moment you can adopt a koala, not actually take it home [Lower Hunter]

I don't know about a sanctuary but a hospital, I know they've got a hospital at Port Macquarie. It is a good place for injured koalas or koalas that are not able to be returned into their natural habitats and stuff like that [North Coast]

15.3.3 Tourism concept

There is literature currently being put forward which discusses how a koala sanctuary could create up to 10,000 jobs. This concept was raised by the moderator to the focus groups and below are their reactions.

Positive response

Good location

Some participants thought Coffs Harbour would be a good location for an investment into a koala sanctuary. Coffs Harbour already is offering tourist experiences and the koala sanctuary could add to the appeal of going to Coffs Harbour

Coffs Harbour has a lot going for it in terms of, it's not just like you'd only be going there to see that one thing. It would add to the idea, appeal of going to Coffs Harbour, but it wouldn't be the only thing people would drive there for [Lower Hunter]

Visiting opportunities

There was recognition that koalas can be difficult to see in their habitats. One participant thought 'glamping'/living amongst the koalas would be a lovely opportunity. It has the potential to interest tourists.

So you can stay in anything from hotel style rooms to glamping so I was actually looking at prices of that to see whether it was a feasible little holiday to go to. And as I say I must admit I don't know where exactly it was I know it was the North Coast, that

opportunity to sleep in that environment nearby where they're doing some good work to protect koalas was a nice thought [Sydney]

Reservations

10,000 jobs unrealistic

All participants struggled to understand how a koala sanctuary could provide 10,000 jobs. Protecting koalas is important, but there was amusement in each group about how this number of jobs could be considered a possibility. Some participants understand the multiplier factor with jobs being created that are indirect to the sanctuary, but 10,000 is far too many to be believable. As one participant commented, 'it is not Movie Land'.

I'm not quite sure how it could create that many jobs especially seeing it and how small it is, I'm not quite sure how that would even be managed [Sydney]

I find it interesting because when you see those stats they always put up it's always a case of well it begs 10,000 jobs okay how many of them actually dealing with koalas well it might be like 500 but then you need surrounding services and all the other job we generate and then pluck this number out it's just it does my head in [Tablelands]

Maybe 100 jobs but not 10,000 [North Coast]

Coffs Harbour - poor location

Coffs Harbour was not viewed by all as a good location for the sanctuary. There were discussions around how people travel through Coffs Harbour on their way to either Queensland or Sydney, and the unlikely prospect they will stop to visit the koala sanctuary. Coffs Harbour is busy so ideally the sanctuary would be located nowhere near busy roads and urbanisation.

It's a very busy area, you have to drive through Coffs to go to Queensland, unless you want to go the longer way. I think Coffs is just, no, not the perfect place. More inland but a sanctuary I would find that it would be more away from the noises and the traffic and the less likely for them to put themselves into harm's way because we're driving along and not paying attention, sort of thing [North Coast]

Maybe 25 or 30 years ago, I remember when I was back in Guildford with my parents we drove up to Coffs for a holiday and we went to Big Banana, we went to Port Macquarie on the way as well. There are some things there that we did that are still around today. I don't see why families would go there for a holiday, that's a pretty long trip [North Coast]

Koalas are difficult to find in bushland

Participants who are familiar with koalas discussed how difficult it is to find them in bushland. Koalas are thought to be secretive, well camouflaged and almost impossible to find in a tree. These participants do not know how people would be able to find a koala in an

extensive sanctuary. They also feel there are better options such as zoos or wildlife parks where koalas are more visible if a person would like to see a koala.

I think if they were calling through, driving by or near the area, let's take a day out there, on a day trip and show the kids some koalas, especially the ones from Sydney. You don't see them hanging off telegraph poles. If us that live in areas where we're lucky to see them still in the wild, no we probably wouldn't [North Coast]

Koala parks not appealing

In each focus group participants discussed how they may or may not like the concept of a koala sanctuary, but nearly none of them have visited a koala park. Seeing koalas in captivity is of no interest to them. These participants are not sure what it would take to make them interested in visiting a sanctuary.

In Western Sydney they have a koala reserve park whatever, I know I've driven past it many times and never thought to even stop [Sydney]

I'm pretty much the exact same as Paul, I definitely wouldn't go. But I mean it's weird because I know when I was in Costa Rica last year and I would go to National Parks to see all the different animals but when it comes to like in your own home for me that's I'd much rather do other things [Sydney]

16 Definitions

16.1 Terms for definition

Focus group participants were given a series of terms or works to consider and then asked to describe what that term means to them. The terms or words are:

- Wood chipping
- Regrowth forest
- Old growth
- Rainforest
- Regeneration
- Logging
- Selective harvesting
- Mechanical harvesters
- Thinning forest
- Active management of forests
- Renewable

16.1.1 Meaning of terms

Wood chipping

Participants defined wood chipping as the process where a tree is mulched and turned into small chips. From there, the chips have a variety of uses such as paper, garden beds, children's playground and toilet paper.

When you say wood chipping, wood chipping is basically breaking down the tree into the chips to then go on to do other things. I don't necessarily think of it as being the chips sure that's what they make but then other things go and be made from those wood chips

People put it in their gardens, helps stop the weeds

Gardens, they also use them in children's playgrounds sometimes, comfort so they don't hurt themselves as much if they fall over

Regrowth forest

There were a number of interpretations for what a regrowth forest might be which suggests the term is not well understood or easy for participants to guess what might be accurate.

- A forest has been cut down, more trees are put in or regrow and the process can start again in another thirty or more years
Where they've cut all the trees down and then they've put more trees to come back in, 30 years' time we'll be able to start all over again
- A forest that has been left to regrow
Regrowth forest would be where it is not clear fell to start with, it's selective and just left to regrow for more than 20 or 30 years
- A forest where not all the trees have been cut down but there is space for new and smaller ones to grow
I'd imagine it being not all of the trees cut down at once but cutting down some and having some new ones growing so that's constantly growing and not just empty
- It is part of a regrowth process where only the matured size trees are taken
It's that regrowth process of just taking and then constantly moving around to take what's matured or the size that they need
- A forest that has taken a long time to grow
Is it one that has taken a really, really long time to grow
- A forest that has been backburned

Old growth

There were numerous interpretations of what old growth means. Again, this suggests it is a concept that is not being interpreted similarly by people.

- A forest where trees are very old
Hardwood to me
The closest I've seen anything along those lines there is a part of Northern Ontario if you go into it you will see trees are 200 plus years old. It's just an area that has been zoned off to just accommodate some very, very, old trees
- A forest where the trees take a long time to grow
Trees that take a long time to grow, I guess some trees grow faster than others
- A forest where the trees have never been touched
Its got a very diversified fauna and flora. You got to cut some hardwoods and some softwoods and a whole range of different trees and different canopies. So it's sort of like unique in a lot of respects and should be preserved, you have to have to some areas that aren't touched
- It is a forest that will be protected
Some of our older trees that are a bit protected. I know we have some in Grafton that are over 150 years old, they're not allowed to be cut down because of their age

- A forest that is at least 10 - 15 years old

I would assume it's one that has been replanted 10 or 15 years prior

Rainforest

There was common agreement about what a rainforest might be. The qualities of a rainforest could have are, waterfalls, greenery, moisture, frogs and fungus. There is a lot of fauna and flora variety in these forests. They are protected and they are old. It was common for people to say they visualise the Amazon when they think about rainforests.

Forest that lives within and it's an ecosystem as well that lives within a particular climate, temperature climate range. It's a forest that has wildlife, a wide range of different flora and fauna and they all work together to create an ecosystem that works off each other

Really high trees where basically they're essentially untouched and just surrounded by moisture, vapour

It makes me think of protected areas, natural waterfalls, lots of frogs and wet, fungus on trees, a natural thing

Regeneration

Regeneration is defined as the restoration of a forest after the forest has experienced an event such as a fire or a harvest. The regeneration can be a natural process or there can be intervention with seeds being planted. It is a hopeful word for participants as it suggests a fresh start from an impact that has occurred on the forest.

For me that reminds me of what we were talking about earlier, after a fire or some kind of natural disaster when all the plants are starting to grow again. It could also be after they're cut down, if they're being forested

The bushfire goes through and then it naturally regenerates itself and starts growing again

In the sense of logging and in the sense of foresting, the sense of planting trees and having something to come back on and regenerating life and even koalas are rehabilitated. Looking after the forest so you have something for your kids to see, later upon

Logging

Logging conjures up a strong visual image of trees being 'cut down' and put on trucks. It is a negative word and is associated with words such as 'terrible', 'decimation' and 'industrial scale'.

Cutting down trees, basically. I know there is a lot more involved, they have to rip the bark and stuff like that, I don't know if it goes as far as cutting the logs into planks. Basically, it is cutting down the tree

Terrible

Removing trees and removing forests, complete decimation

Well the cutting down of a tree is logging and usually used in connection with industrial scale production of wood rather than recreational getting rid of a tree because its old and about to fall on your house

Selective harvesting

These words suggest to participants a choice is made about which trees are selected to remove and only the most appropriate trees are chosen. Only the trees that are needed are taken and there is a process behind which trees are selected such as those that are straight, a certain width and/or age or species. The same rules apply for native forests and pine wood.

That Big Lumber show that we were talking about, its actually targeting certain types of trees and certain types of wood in an area. This way you are clearing the area entirely its targeted so just say we only want elm of this calibre, they go looking for elm of that calibre nothing else

If it is a pine plantation then the only way I could see that applied is pine plantation is that they are only looking for a certain size. Anything smaller we're not touching it we only want this size or this size

It's going into a forest where there is different species of trees and deciding you are only going take one species or two species and leave the others behind. Perhaps the ones that are left behind are not commercially valuable trees

Selective harvesting, my friend that I was telling you about at Mount George, he had a few trees on his property, they happened to be dead straight, they ended up taking them out and sold them off his property and they took them out by helicopter. They got a helicopter to come in and get it out and then they had the stuff on the property ready to load them up. He got a lot of money for them; they were certain types of trees. Is that selective harvesting?

Mechanical harvesters

Participants were not familiar with mechanical harvesters, but most assumed they are equipment used in the process of harvesting trees. They are thought to be big pieces of machinery and could even be trucks. They are a mechanical way of removing trees as opposed to chain sawing. They are a faster way of harvesting trees. It is not always a positive visual image for some participants.

Big trucks that are able to, I don't know whether they cut the trees down or whether they remove the branches, so you've got the big log part thing

I look at what they've done here, putting this road in, they've just in with great big graders and big trucks and they've just pushed the trees down and thrown them away, that's my understanding of that

Traditionally it's used for harvesting wheat and stuff like that but in terms of forestry I guess it is when they just hauling the timbers up mechanically and wood chipping and slicing you need the big machines to create a corridor to get them in and out. It has a picture of a big operation basically just going through and clear filling the whole area

Anything that isn't a man holding an axe cutting down trees, something to come across and do the job, it is easier that way than having man labour where you could have one person in a vehicle that does the whole thing in a matter of moments

Thinning forest

Participants were not familiar with this term, but most were able to produce a reasonable definition. The concept of a thinning forest is where the forest is made less dense and the purpose of thinning it is to reduce the risk of fires, to help other trees grow by allowing light into the forest, to ensure the stronger trees are able to grow and not competing with weaker ones. One participant likened it to thinning hair, another thought it was the same as selective harvesting and another thought it was a disguised way of describing 'selective logging'.

If they are cutting down too many trees within that forest, it has gone from being quite dense with lots of trees really close together and now it's sparser with fewer trees due to foresting

If it's too thick with brush it increases the chance of fire and it decreases your chances to control it

I was going to say when it happens if you have too many trees which are dense and all competing for resources some aren't just going to make it if they're stacked too tight, maybe

A very young forest where the trees are only 15 or 20 years old where they go through and thin it out so the solid trees can grow up strong (forestry)

If someone said that to me I would think of, you know when you have really thick hair and you thin it out, I would think of that but with a forest

I think it is sort of a sweet way of saying selective logging really

Active management of forests

This is the phrase that drew the broadest range of interpretations. The range is:

- There is a plan that takes into account the soils, wildlife and the area where the trees are best to harvest

Possibly they have a plan on where they are going to take trees from and where they're going to regrow or understanding the soils that are best to regrow in and making sure they're looking after the wildlife in those particular areas so it's not like they're rolling in and going right we're going to cut everything down ahead of us for the next kilometre. They actually have a plan in place knowing what they want to do

- Forest health. The health of the forest is paramount and time, effort and money will be put into making sure the forest health is prioritised
 - I hear the word management you always think doing something that's sustainable, making it the best it can be*
 - They're doing more than just keeping an eye on it. They're making a lot of effort and time and money into managing the forest itself and everything that goes with it*
 - I would assume that they're actively going for walks and drives to see where everything is at, animal wise as habitation as well as plants and see what is dying and needs fixing and that sort of thing*
- It is the cycle process that participants were shown earlier in the focus group
 - The active management that graph that we looked at with the three steps it takes my mind straight back to that*
- Managing the forest by controlling re-growth and seeding
 - Rather than allowing natural regrowth from wild seeds deliberately planting small trees for example juvenile trees to speed up the reforestation*
 - I wouldn't know how to put it into words. What we've got now with rangers, maintaining and culling and planting and doing what needs to be done to keep everything balanced*
- Protecting the forest and native wildlife from predatory animals
 - We have deer in the area that have escaped and deer are really bad, feral pigs are really bad, that's also I feel a part of your forest management because they are part of the ecosystem and safety of some of the earmarking out some like the Lyrebird and the Bowerbird and their nest, managing some of our Australian species*
- Backburning is included in the management of forests. Most of the participants feel backburning (hazard reduction) is essential as it can curtail the extend and damage should a fire occur
 - Backburning to manage so that there are not big bushfires. I know there are a lot of people that oppose that. We have had really bad destructive bushfires in our area, people have lost their homes and a lot of people had to be evacuated in the areas here, we personally aren't in an area, but we had friends that had to evacuate and they had fires right up to their back fence. There is always for and against with that as well. That's how I would interpret that*
- Managing a forest is simply about making money
 - I think that's more towards money*
- It is another way of describing logging
 - If I pass the words now I would say they are logging it. If it was passively managed it would be left to its own devices but if it's actively managed, it sounds like some logging*

Renewable

The general consensus is that renewable means bringing a forest back to its original state. This term includes regrowth, replanting and replacing a forest that has been 'taken down'. It is a positive term and suggests hope for most participants. There are a few participants for whom this word is meaningless. They either do not believe it as a concept, it is a 'buzz word' or they simply feel that once a tree has been cut, it is dead and it can never be regrown.

- Positive interpretations

A source that can be renewed. A tree that can regrow

Regrowing again, regrowing the forest, replanting, replacing the forest that they have taken down

The new growth of the forest after they've been selectively harvested

Has the capability of fixing itself, helping itself, growing stronger

- Other interpretations

When you say renewable, nowadays you just think of solar panels. Renewable energy is something that most of the time is to do with sun and most of the time to do with renewable in the sense of rechargeable batteries type thing, something that can keep going and going without having to buy new ones. With trees you can't really, once they're cut down they're dead, that's it

Renewable is a bullshit word because once a tree is cut down you can't renew it. You can plant another, but you can't renew. I think that's what they tried to say renewable when we're planting seeds it's renewing it. I don't know exactly what it is but that's my take on it

17 Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs)

17.1 KOL summary

Social licence to operate is the foundation concept behind this research.

Key Opinion Leaders (KOP) are an important part of understanding the social licence that native forestry holds.

If those who make decisions are supportive of the industry then the industry will have significant decisions makers and influencers promoting and helping others to understand its importance.

If the KOLs who oppose native forestry are the majority and/or have strong networks of influence then the native forestry industry will not have social licence to operate.

KOLs came from the following groupings:

- Timber business owner or manager
- Other business owner or manager
- Environmental Non-Governmental Organisations (ENGOS)
- Commonwealth Government officials
- State Government officials
- Community leaders
- University and Government researchers
- Media
- Federal Politicians
- State Politicians
- Local Government Mayors

17.2 KOL key findings - summary

Industry overview

In NSW, there are 7.7 million hectares formally dedicated to National Parks and reserves. Native State forests account for a further 1.8 million hectares with just under half of these forests made available for timber supply. Of all the public native forests in NSW only twelve percent (12%) is available for producing hardwood timber.

Key opinion leaders

Native forestry has had a turbulent history. There is agreement that the tighter controls placed on native forestry in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s were warranted because of over-harvesting of trees. Controversy continues and in 2023, there are many opinions as to whether native forestry should be discontinued, be modified or increased.

The current supply structure for native forestry is:

- Forestry Corporation - responsible for supplying 60 -70% of hardwood product
- Private Native Forests (PNF) - responsible for supplying the remaining hardwood product

Australia is a net importer of timber.

Timber products usage

Hardwood is an essential product according to KOLs who are supportive of native forestry. Its qualities cannot be replaced by pinewood, nor can enough pinewood be grown to replace the hardwood forests in North East NSW. Many businesses within NSW and Australia rely on hardwood because substitute products are considered inferior. There is concern among these KOLs that if hardwood production were to cease the only solution would be to import. The two main issues with importing hardwood are associated with the costs this will incur; there is the cost of importing and the impact these increases will have on industries that use hardwood. There will be no alternative to passing these costs on to the end user. If the community accepts this proposition, native forestry will have licence to operate.

KOLs who do not support native forestry do not believe hardwood is an essential product. Alternatives can be found and pinewood is a suitable replacement. They believe there will never be an appropriate time for hardwood forestry to cease, so it should be now before the forests and all ecosystems within it are further degraded. These KOLs believe the public understand the perilous position of forests and therefore native forestry will not have social licence to operate.

Native forestry - unsustainable

KOLs who participated in this research provided a range of reasons for why native forestry should cease operating. The overarching ideology that underpins their belief is that the forests are degraded and have been degraded since colonisation. The only way to restore the forests and make steps towards deterring climate change is to remove the native forestry industry. They believe the science is overwhelming and governments need to take immediate action.

These KOLs want the public to understand the inadequacies of the Forestry Corporation and the way it manages the forests. They believe many species are close to extinction. Accordingly, native forestry does not have social licence to operate; these KOLs are confident native forestry will be forced to stop operating and State forests will be returned to the public via tourism and outdoor activity through options being made available.

Native forestry - sustainable

The strengths of the native forestry industry are discussed in terms of:

- Forestry Corporation values
- Economic contribution
- Best practice approach
- Dedicated staff

KOLs believe the native forestry industry not only produces products people need and want, but it is an industry that follows strict protocols that ensure the processes which take place within the forests are best practice, world class, and sustainable.

Forestry Corporation is the major contributor of hardwood supply. Those working for this organisation would like the public to understand the length they go to when working in the forest. They find arguments along the lines they are a cost to the taxpayer negligent and disingenuous as they fail to relay the broader contribution they make; nor is the actual cost of National Parks ever discussed - an entity which is far more expensive than the State forests but a cost which is never raised by the ENGOS.

Staff who work in this industry are dedicated and make valuable broader community contributions.

If native forestry were discontinued, these KOLs believe that not just the economy of NSW would be compromised, but so too would the taxpayers and local communities suffer damage. These KOLs believe once this impact is recognised by the community, native forestry will have social licence to operate.

Private native forestry

PNF is viewed by some as the future of native forestry and by others as a poor option.

KOLs who support native forestry believe with government support and land buy-back, forests outside the State forests can be grown on private land.

KOLs who do not support PNF believe there is already ample evidence these forests are not healthy, those who manage them are unskilled and lack the financial resources and skill to produce quality timber and the expenses involved in the process will be too high for the gain. Additionally, there is great concern that once a forest is established many rules and regulations will be further applied which will reduce even more the potential efficiency of the private production of timber.

Misinformation

KOLs who support native forestry are frustrated by the misinformation in the public space which they believe is deliberately untruthful and paints the industry as a poor operator

Key opinion leaders

ruining the environment. There is recognition that this is an effective tool in limiting the existing social licence to operate the native forestry industry.

These KOLs have tried to connect with the conservationist groups but have found these groups reject any attempts to try to discuss their differing points of view. They would like better communication to take place, which would give both parties an opportunity to share their opinions and learn from each other.

Koalas

Koalas were discussed extensively by KOLs.

Those opposed to native forestry believe the koalas are near extinction and need to be protected. Forestry is a key reason they are under threat and this will justify the Great National Koala Park being discussed - it being in the heartland of native forestry.

KOLs who support native forestry believe they go to great length to support the koalas so they can live in their native habitats. These KOLs believe there is ample scientific evidence available to demonstrate koalas are not near extinction and there are more than has been believed. Koalas are under threat in urban areas due to roadkill, lack of habitat, dogs and chlamydia. These KOLs believe there is also evidence to demonstrate koalas live equally well in State forests and National Parks.

It is understood that the perception of misinformation about koalas is hurting the native forestry industry's social licence to operate.

Fires

The 2019/2020 fires are largely blamed by KOLs who do not support forestry. They believe the degradation of forests has allowed these fires to be hotter and more intense than in pre-colonisation.

KOLs who support native forestry do not agree with this proposition. They believe the 'lock up and leave' approach that allows for significant undergrowth to build up played a significant role in the 2019/2020 fires.

Councils

The councils who participated in this research support forestry. They all agreed the local communities would be devastated if native forestry were discontinued. This is more than the loss of jobs by those who are directly involved in the industry; those who have supportive roles will be equally affected.

Councils main gripe with native forestry is the lack of contribution to maintaining the roads in the councils LGA.

These KOLs believe the forestry industry in their area will have social licence to operate due to the significant contribution that is made economically and socially by this industry.

17.3 Key Opinion Leader - Report

17.3.1 Connections to forests

Forests are respected by all KOLs even though opinions about forests vary significantly. There is agreement that forests in the past were not always well managed but due to laws and regulations introduced in the 1990s that saw the available land to harvest reduced, this has resulted in far less native forestry. For many, since the changes in availability of land, there has been a notable improvement in the way the State forests are managed.

Those directly engaged with forestry make varying connections and observation about the environment where they work and specialise. The range of perspectives about forests can initially be summarised as:

- A sacred and spiritual connection is made about parts of the forest that should remain untouchable based on the significance to the First Nations people
- Respecting each tree in the forest and understanding the impact each tree has on that forest is a core philosophical consideration to the way a forest is managed
- Understanding the impact of being in a forest and from that, understanding what are the 'good and bad ways' of interacting in all aspects of the forest needs to be acknowledged
- Old growth forests and their systems have been fundamentally changed and there needs to be long range plans in place for how the forestry health is to be repaired
- Economic value of a tree needs to be reassessed. Hardwood products are possibly being sold too cheaply
- Native forestry is an industry where people are focussed on making money and this approach is to the detriment of the forest because economic decisions are made ahead of sustainable ones
- Foresters appreciate and have genuine respect for the ability of the forest to renew, its sustainability, and regrowth. They are passionate about the forest and its health and make every effort to ensure its health and vitality are protected

Examples of opinions:

Key opinion leaders

There are other places we can go, and we can say the same thing, the totemic trees are not valued, there are certain places in the catchment and forest systems where the resources we wouldn't take from there because they're sacred areas for stories and for regeneration, like black bean, the bogam, that's the totem for me. We have stories where those beans are sacred in those areas and people aren't allowed to take the beans from there, which means they won't be able to cut the trees down either

My brother is a cabinet maker, I love timber and I think that's a part of the thing for me, it's a part of the story is us valuing the resources better and being more conscious about how we manage those resources so that we have the kind of value added products in our economy that we want. The idea that we just grow timber to turn it into paper and send it off to Japan for me doesn't make any sense. There are other ways we can produce fibre for paper production than destroying ecosystems, I would have thought

The challenge comes in the economics because people are driven by economics, it's just the way people are. People have different values around how they value things and what they value. Obviously foresters generally in an economic context value the trees that they cut down and they sell to the market. That means there is a whole heap of other values that they don't necessarily, generally speaking, value

People don't know what to do in the landscape and they take too much or they're greedy or the technology makes it much more efficient but in tradition all our ancestors, wherever you're from you go back to a traditional relationship where there is only so much impact you can have and through that relationship of knowing the good ways and bad ways of interacting with the species or a system there are benefits from that

Sustainable resource use is really critical as a First Nations person. We survive off country, country gives us everything we need. I've got no issues with cutting down a tree if people understand the value of that tree and they have a process around acknowledging that tree and understanding the impact that that's having and also making sure that they're not just cutting down any tree they want. There are only some trees that you're allowed to cut down because you understand the kinship in that system and the way forests function

That's the kind of thing, how do we do that better. It's obviously values and there's a lot of conflict there and there always will be but that's where we have to go. We have to push at the interface of that conflict and learn to do things better and build better systems, better valuing. It may mean that people have to pay a lot more for stuff. Maybe they have to pay the real price for things and that's what we're seeing all over the world

Key opinion leaders

I really have become completely addicted to that being able to go out to the forest and work in the forest and the forests in Northern NSW in particular are just great places to work they're incredible. I guess I have seen it all in terms of fire fighting and active harvesting operations and regeneration, tree planting; I've worked in every aspect of forestry so I know it really well and I guess once you've worked there for 25 years you really do start to get that appreciation for that genuine sense of renewal, sustainability, regrowth all that kind of thing. I'm a huge advocate for managing our forests. What I feel like I'm in a position where I've had the opportunity to work in our forests and understand their diversity and the diversity of issues associated with them and I think I have a really deep understanding of those things

That's the thinking I have. We need to think about how we restore those old growth trees in the systems and thinking about how forests work and how do we build really strong, long term. We need 100, 200, 300 year plans for forestry in the region if we're genuinely honest about sustainability, forest health then let's build them. Let's think about how do we get 200, 300 year old trees left in the system that we don't cut down, but we can cut down trees around that to create the succession in the forest and create the integrity of the system and the genuine, we can go to the landscapes and show we've restored this country, this is what the old country looks like

17.3.2 Forestry evolution

A few participants discussed the background to native forestry. The sequence of evolution of the State Forest was described as following this pathway:

- Early 1900 - State forestry act came about as land had been handed to people with the task of clearing the land. It was felt that if this was to continue, there would be no forests left which would leave a timber shortage
- As a result, State forests were created in NSW and other states
- The Forestry Commission was established which undertook to use available science to manage the forests, growing and sustaining trees for future timber supplies
- Nature reserves within the state forests were created. These were areas with a particular type of ecology that were thought to be in need of preserving
- The 1950s saw an increase in the production of houses which put pressure on the native forests and it was at this time the Radiata Pine was developed which led to the introduction of pine plantations
- In the 1970s the rainforests were protected and timber harvesting in these forests stopped
- In the 1980s old-growth forests were similarly protected

Key opinion leaders

- In the late 1990s the industry was reduced significantly, and wood supply was cut in half. National Parks were expanded. Many left the industry at this point in time due to the lack of available timber to sustain their businesses.

There is agreement the industry needed parameters put in place as not everyone in the industry had a broader vision of forest health and long-term sustainability. Some feel the Regional Forest Agreements have perhaps gone too far.

They had a bit of kinship in the system, the same as the old people, not totally the same but similar because people are living in the forest, they are developing values. Obviously there are extremes to that, the same in an aboriginal culture, not everyone was an Elder and got it all, there were plenty of people that did the wrong thing and did get it and just did whatever they wanted

Since the Regional Forest Agreements came into place to tell how much timber how much land is set aside for timber supply and how much for conservation needs, since that time the successive Governments and in particular the Carr Government have given away more than half of the remaining State forest to the conservation estates so an area where it was settled have been gone and taken another half out, which has meant it's put more pressure on the remaining forest to supply the same amount of timber. In creating what they perceive as a good conservation outcome exactly put pressure on the forests because contracts still have to be met and timber needs to be supplied but I think forestry corporation does a great job in trying to balance the conservation outcomes and the timber supply

17.3.3 Size of forestry

The current size of the forests is:

National Parks: 7.7 million hectares

State forests: 1.8 million hectares with just under half being reserved for timber supply. Of all the public native forests in NSW only twelve percent (12%) of this area is available for producing hardwood timber.

Available land for native forest harvesting

I don't think barely anywhere in the world does considering even looking at New Zealand and Canada which is probably our two closest equivalents, they allow timber harvesting to some extent in their national parks, we don't do that in Australia. Even the State Forest Reserve, I think only 12% can be hardwood. You're talking 12% of about a third of the forest in the state. It's not a lot and people don't understand that

17.3.4 Industry supply structure

There are two sources of timber supply in Australia

Forestry Corporation: owned by the state government and its role is to manage the State forests in NSW

- Forestry Corporation is the largest supplier of native timber in NSW. It supplies between 50-60 percent of the hardwood material
- Forestry Corporation KOLs believe Forestry Corporation are world class operators in forest management
- Currently the timber contracts they are offering are continuing to 2028 which is causing considerable tensions and uncertainty within the industry

That's been where we are and that's great now that they've extended it for us. We're now back in the situation where, okay we've got five years of wood supply, what do you do with that, you really need a 10-year window to invest

It's not like we have a lot of choice, we're invested here, and we can't just pack up and go down the road. We've got to put up with it. You just become used to it, but it doesn't lead to a good outcome for anybody as far as securing new staff, training people, what sort of people you can attract into the industry

- Private native forestry (PNF)
 - These are native forests that are grown commercially or privately on properties outside of the National Parks and State forests

17.4 Timber products

17.4.1 Summary

A hardwood tree is given this status because of the strength of the wood. KOLs who support native forestry spoke of the essential qualities that hardwood contains and how these are irreplaceable. There are industries who rely on hardwood and without them, moving goods or working in construction will be near impossible. Plantation wood (pine) is valuable and is suitable for many purposes but lacks the strength and durability often required. These KOLs do not believe the cost of converting hardwood forests to more pine forests is being taken into account. There currently is not enough timber supply in Australia; if the hardwood industry is closed both hardwood and pinewood will have to be imported. There is concern about the likely source of hardwood timber.

KOLs who do not support native forestry believe pine plantations will meet required needs and do not feel the absence of hardwood production in Australia will have any impact. They have confidence alternative sources are available, such as strengthening the pinewood with chemicals, and more alternatives will be created. The value of the forests not being logged or harvested is far preferable than the minor inconveniences that will occur due to the absence of hardwood.

KOLs who support native forestry believe the industry does have social licence to operate based on their estimation that the results which will arise if native forestry is forced to cease operating will hit all levels of society. The KOLs who do not support native forestry believe it does not have social licence to operate due to the damage it creates in state forests.

17.4.2 NSW Hardwood

The uses for hardwood produced in NSW are:

- Telegraph poles
- Sleepers
- Bridge structures
- Houses: major structural beams
- Decking
- Marine usage
- 'Bespoke' flooring
- Some furniture
- Pallets

The hardwood from North East NSW is described as being both strong and 'beautiful', making it a much desired product.

There's heaps of positive stuff in the broader media space about wood and that's excellent and I think when you look at the wood products from Northern NSW it's a real strength because they are really pretty special. Other parts of the State have wood production that is not quite as it's just not the beautiful high end fantastic stuff that you get from the North like the stuff behind me here

17.4.3 Hardwood qualities

Many KOLs strongly argued the need for NSW to continue to produce hardwood. For these KOLs, there is no substitute for hardwood and any substitute products used will be inferior.

A distinction was made between an essential product and a preferred product. Furniture, decking and some floorings are non-essential but preferred by many people because of their rich texture and aesthetic appeal.

Essential products that require hardwood are, for example, power poles and bridge timbers. One KOL described the increasing need for NSW to repair up to 60,000 bridges and the demand just this alone will place on hardwood supply. Hardwood is the only wood that is strong enough to provide the support needed.

A power pole is not quite a preference good it is an essential good. There is a certain percentage of products that have to go into that. XXX needed to replace some bridge deckings and it took her 18 months to find a dimensional lumber [that was] needed out of hardwood to replace the bridge, the bit that we drive over. There is something like 60,000 bridges in NSW alone. Most of those were put in or about World War II and they had 50-year design life, guess what people we are 20 years beyond their design life, they are going to be needing to be replaced in the next 20 years and that's quite a bit of wood

We've had other products such as railways tyres, sleepers that were all wood, they are transitioning to concrete but a whole lot of people are wanting to go back to wood because it had other properties. Structural beams and physical mechanical properties that you get from hardwood can't be recreated in softwood with the same dimension.

17.4.4 Arguments for pinewood plantations

The arguments put forward for why pinewood can replace hardwood are:

- Softwood is used predominantly to build houses and there will be a lower demand for building post COVID-19. There is enough availability of pinewood to be able to meet demand
- Hardwood plantations grown outside of State forests are a viable way to grow hardwood. The belief is the seedlings are planted and the trees supported as they grow to the point where they become independent. Access to the hardwood plantations is simpler as will harvesting as they will be in rows and being the same age they will mature at the same time. It is felt it is a more economical approach to growing hardwood

Key opinion leaders

Absolutely, again we have a policy that would develop what we would suggest are suitable hardwood plantations but the movement broadly, absolutely agrees that these will always be superior than harvesting our naturally occurring native forest. We're certainly supportive of the expansion of the hardwood industry. Hardwood plantation industry in a sustainable way

- New plantations can be grown on land that already has exemptions for clearing

... we want to see plantations, new plantations occurring for example on already cleared land or areas that have land that have exemptions for clearing. We don't want to see a major forest cleared and then replanted; it's obviously not helping anyone

- The argument that native forestry has to continue because there is no viable alternative is not an acceptable argument in the eyes of these KOLs. These KOLs believe there has to be a time when the transition occurs and there will never be the perfect time. A plan needs to be put in place so the transition can be made

The biggest trouble we're seeing as well is this idea that, we haven't got enough plantations, so we'll just have to keep logging until we get plantations. I don't think that cuts it, I don't think the wrongs of the past and the mismanagement of the forest can justify the continuation while we get it right. If there has to be some kind of hiatus in terms of the alternatives to timber production we need to look at that

- Private native forestry was offered as a viable alternative so long as it is monitored more stringently. [Note: Private native forestry is discussed in section 3.5]

the environment movement currently has some concerns regarding the looseness of regulation throughout private native forestry, we've made that pretty clear in some submissions and ask of government. If we're able to tighten that up and also support agro forestry, that is farm forestry, supporting farmers to have plantations on their land, that's one part of the puzzle

- The Forestry Corporation has purchased crown land and hardwood forests could be planted on these

I'm not an expert but I'm pretty sure they will just be on crown land of some variety and has been for some time but existing state forests. Often they have bought private land and then converted it or existing crown land, for whatever reason it was already cleared or suitable for it

- There is an understanding the industry will need to be supported while the transition is made. The government will need to invest and support the industry to ensure a smooth transition. Those in the environmental movement are prepared to discuss how the transition can be made

Obviously where that land needs to occur, we are alive to the issue that there is only so much land and there is always some land use conflict issue with this and unfortunately we don't have all the answers either, but we would certainly be willing to work with whomever to map that out eventually

17.4.5 Arguments against Pinewood dependency

KOLs who support native forestry hold strong opinions about why pinewood cannot replace hardwood. These arguments include aesthetics, strength and economic reasons.

Pinewood is not as strong as hardwood

- A belief was put forward that pinewood, particularly when grown in good soil can cause the tree to grow too quickly. This means the wood is not as strong

I think one of the big problems with plantations is some of them get planted in too quick a growing area, too good a soil, you don't want it to be too quick growing, it has its own problems when it comes to being too free, it doesn't want to hold together very well

- Pinewood floorboards are softer and less durable than hardwood floorboards. They are easily damaged and for some are not as appealing

I lived in an old govy in Canberra, it had a pine floor, as soon as we had friends around you had to say take your shoes off at the door guys because a woman walking across the floor with stilettos on would leave this beautiful trail. I've got hardwood floors out of the Hurford Mill in my house now and they are pretty bulletproof. Did I need to go to hardwood timber for my floors, no I didn't, that is a top end product, but I wanted to. Every house design program you see in Australia uses beautiful hardwood floor, that's a selling point

Pinewood plantation supply

- Structural timber is described as making an important contribution in the building industry. One participant in considering the concept of changing softwood plantations into hardwood plantations discussed how a major limitation of this is the difficulty in making that conversion as the trees currently growing are not fit for the purposes they are required for

The plantation forests, we have tens of thousands of hectares of hardwood plantations, we have a million plus hectares of softwood plantations. The majority of the softwoods we have planted in Australia today are being grown for short rotation fibre crops, for producing tissues, newsprint, cardboard. Those same trees can't readily be converted into growing structural timber

- Several KOLs who work in the forestry industry discussed how the supply of pinewood in Australia is currently limited and unable to meet the current needs within Australia. These KOLs feel an often-used argument is put forward that pinewood is the answer to eliminating hardwood but based on current needs, this would be an unworkable scenario.

Yeah plantation resource will never supply what we need, not from a known perspective, but even from the quality the sort of timber you get that's just not going to work. I mean the smarter people know that but it's a tool to get out of native forestry for them to say plantations will fix it all

Economic barrier

The cost of replacing the hardwood industry was raised by a few who work in the forestry industry. The argument used can be summarised as:

- A minimum of 150,000 hectares of land would need to be purchased to obtain the same 'fibre output'
- To purchase this land, it was estimated it would cost \$30,000 per hectare
- The land that could be purchased will be compromised in some way because it might contain areas of vegetation that cannot be cleared or could contain wetlands which means even more land will have to be purchased
- The purchase of land, the estimated cost will be 6 billion dollars
- The purchase will then have to allow for the purchase of seedlings and then the years it will take to grow the forests
- The quality of the plantation will still not be strong enough to grow power poles, rigid timbers or marine timbers
- It will lack the variety of wood found in a native forest

If you were to try and substitute plantations from native forests in the North Coast you'd need an order of another 150,000 hectares of hardwood plantations to get the same fibre output. Your land cost is going to be in the order of \$30,000 per hectare, you never find a property that is entirely cleared and entirely plantable because there's going to be areas of vegetation have to be retained there's going to be streamlines that can't be planted there's going to be wetlands that can't be planted, your conversion rate from areas you buy to areas planted you're probably going to buy one and a half times the planted area so there is a made loss there so you're going to be paying for around about 200,000 hectares of land to get your 150, 200,000 hectares of land at \$30,000 is something like 6 billion I think. I don't have 6 billion dollars, it's a lot of money and that's hurdle number one. Hurdle number two is you actually have to plant the trees, 6 billion dollars you haven't planted a tree yet that's just buying the land. And then so you have to plant the trees, our capacity at the moment we grow and plant about one and a half million seedlings a year it gets about 1000 hectares planted thereabouts. 1000 hectares a year is our replanting rate for our timber plantations that we harvest. Now you could scale that up but the scaling up of production of seed and nursery stock and all of that would take maybe you could get to say 3 to 5,000 hectares a year that's a bit of a stretch but maybe you could. So to get your 150,000 hectares planted that program itself is going to take you 30 years. Then you have to wait another 30 years before the timber starts being produced and so if you want to give me something like 8 billion dollars and 40 years I'll replace the industry for you. But I won't replace it with a crop that has the capacity to grow power poles or rigid timbers or marine timbers or even possibly a whole range of species because when you work in plantations you are only going to plant about five or six different species that will suit sites here there's blackbutt, spotted gum, a couple of the stringy barks but we grow naturally in our organic native forest, we grow 40 to

50 different species that have all different uses. As you see like it's a massively expensive ludicrously expensive exercise that could only ever partly replace what we have

17.4.6 Arguments against hardwood plantations

There was no support for hardwood plantations even from some who are less supportive of native forestry. Their opposition to this concept is based on the belief that natural regeneration in forests is a superior approach because it limits the impacts of harvesting. Plantation forestry is not necessarily the most robust way to grow these forests for these KOLs.

I'm not a big fan of that. I have a different view; I've seen a lot of plantation forestry and it generally is terrible. I guess there are some economies there and it may be for some species in some landscapes maybe it's fine because it is growing wheat or whatever. I think better off trying to use natural regeneration in forests and limit the impacts of that activity

Further input elsewhere suggests that those who think hardwood plantation is a viable alternative do not understand the process of growing and regeneration. These participants believe the places where there has been harvesting are the perfect places to grow their hardwood forest because they have a proven record of success. Their beliefs include:

- Forests have successfully grown in these areas therefore they are prime for successful growth
- Plantation trees grow at the same time and therefore grow more limbs. In native forests there are more limbs on the outside of the forest than the inside due to the sun. The reduction of limbs makes it easier for the trees to grow straight
- Native forests are mixed ages therefore they are different heights. This means the trees grow straight and tall as they are able to 'reach for the light'. There is not as much competition for sunlight
- Plantations are more expensive to produce as they require more maintenance than if they were allowed to regenerate

17.4.7 Timber shortfall

KOLs were asked where they thought Australia will obtain its timber, both hardwood and softwood, if there is a shortfall due to native industry ceasing operations. Many believe the only answer will be to look to overseas supply and with that they feel the obvious risk is Australia will have no option but to import from countries with poor forestry standards. They are concerned about being dependent on overseas countries and the inflated costs that will be incurred. Those opposing native forestry do not believe Australia will import timber from dubious sources and there are alternative options available that will fill the void.

The belief by those who do not support native forestry harvesting are:

Key opinion leaders

- Australia is a wealthy country, and it will invest in technology that will allow Australia to sustainably grow plantation-based timber
- There are currently many products that will act as a substitute for timber such as timber veneer

I think we are a wealthy enough country to invest in higher tech, higher tech engineering and development of infrastructure or processes that would allow for us to sustainably have a good industry that is plantation based and also there's a whole bunch of engineered timbers that you can use from the softwood, it's like the LBLs and timber veneer. I think we're in a position where we can develop these more complicated and higher tech processes, keep jobs, even value add more to the timber that we do extract from ideally plantations

We even know that this hardwood that we need for our beautiful bespoke deckings and floorboards and that sort of thing, what we know now, and this is just anecdotally, what we know now is most people aren't doing it because even the high end value products we know that you can get this beautiful recycled plastic product that you never need to replace on your house and it looks just like timber. We've got nephews out in Moree as builders and they're saying, wow nobody wants hardwood anymore, this is what we have to do. It costs more, it's valued properly but it lasts a lifetime

- Some believe there are ways to strengthen softwood timbers which will create timber that is as hard as hardwood. This will require the expansion of pinewood forests to meet the demand

There is a whole bunch of engineered softwood timbers that are replacing products that were historically hardwood. There is 90 plus percent softwood and then there is just the veneer on top that makes it look like hardwood flooring. Again, there was the enquiry last year, the future of timber enquiry in NSW and there was a report, and we support a whole bunch of recommendations out of that which includes the expansion to the plantation softwood. We see that as going to be really important to making sure that we can meet the supply as needed moving forward

- Recycling is seen as a viable option for reducing the need to grow and harvest timber. It is felt that rather than waste the timber that has been used, the option to recycle it should be made available.

The reality is there is so much hardwood out there in the environment already. We need to be looking at the recycling sector, we've got to stop this kind of linear use of natural resources where we just keep going, keep going, keep going, because they've run out, they're not there

It's challenging, that's my view. We should be recycling, salvaging, we should be doing all the things we can within the current wood economy better. There are things that we could be doing. You see a lot of waste in the sector, people burn a lot of wood, they could be doing something with. That's where you start in recycle, reuse and then we go, let's limit what we take from outside. I love the idea and we're a long way off, that we reduce our demand on external

Key opinion leaders

- Additionally, some feel the cost of harvesting wood will become too expensive so society will be forced to recycle

The reality is as the market matures this is going to be a reality that timber is costing a lot more and in the future it will cost a lot more and it will get to the point where it will be too expensive to buy timber because the carbon value will be so high because of the extreme pressures on our environment. We will come to the point where we won't be able to cut anything down so that economy will mature, and we will be spending a shit load of money just to recycle and reuse timbers because they will be so expensive to take from the bush

Those who work in or support the native forestry industry hold differing views. This group suggested the following could occur:

- Australia will be forced to import from countries overseas and believe that there may be little choice but to import from countries whose standards are lower than those in NSW

It's not to say I don't want to isolate the Northern Rivers from the world, but I would prefer that anything that came into the Northern Rivers came from a place that was doing the same as what we were doing which was really valuing our resources and only buying things that were sustainable, fair trade, local indigenous people were benefiting because they were looking after those resources in the forests, in the seas, in the rivers. Not just being like, we're creating an elitist space because we're wealthy, protect all our forests and we don't want people cutting down trees

Again, if we go down the path let's hope not in Victoria let's just cut it off it off at the knees come the end of this year, where are they going to get timber to build their homes. And doesn't sit comfortably with people in our community that we'll just go and buy it offshore, we'll go and buy it from countries actually that don't have much choice about where their local economy comes from. And does basically rape and pillage the environment in order to source the timber which they're going to send to us. Are people okay with that where underdeveloped countries actually don't have the choices we have when it comes to harvesting, don't have the restrictions that we have

- There will not be enough timber to supply Australia's needs. Australia, particularly once production ceases in Victoria will be struggling to produce enough timber. COVID-19 exposed Australia's dependence on overseas importing and if the industry were forced to close, this dependency would be even greater.

It was really interesting, the building products going up substantially, lets unpack that for a minute. The building product prices went up substantially because Australia doesn't produce enough building products to be self-sufficient, we were exposed to the international market. A lot of Australia's sawmills were producing more wood and fibre than they ever had. They were producing above their theoretical maximum limits to meet demands and yet prices were going up because the international component was unable to be supplied

Key opinion leaders

- The cost of wood and timber products would dramatically increase which in turn will place even more pressure on the cost of living. These participants hold grave concerns for the impact having to import timber will have on the Australian economy

People that say shutdown our forests, we can buy it from elsewhere, you are exposing yourself to those waves. You're going to ride the international exchange market and the international demand on a basis that FAO, Food and Agriculture Organisation that's predicting a fourfold increase in demand for wood products by 2050. If we are exposing ourselves solely to getting products from the international market, if the demand is going up fourfold the price will go up eightfold

17.5 Native forestry - unsustainable

17.5.1 Summary

This section is representing the opinions of those who oppose native forestry. This section is included so a full discussion about the native forestry industries social licence to operate can be properly contemplated.

Those opposed to the native forestry industry provided a multitude of reasons why the industry should not be allowed to operate. The main reasons are: degradation of forests and the need to restore the forests to their original status; forestry occurs in prime State Forest locations; Forestry Corporation is inadequate in its approach to forestry management; forestry is on public land; and species are heading towards extinction. There are deeply held beliefs for this group that without immediate action, the State forests will be irreversibly damaged which with the growing evidence of climate change is not acceptable.

17.5.2 Reasons for closure

The reasons for closure provided by those opposed to native forestry are extensive. Aside from the already discussed argument that plantation forests are the future, there are many other reasons those opposed to native forestry have been raised.

Degradation of forests

There is a strong belief that the forests have been degraded since colonisation. Reference was made to past practices where forestry took the most valuable trees, the ones that would make them the most money and disregarded the overall health of the forests.

I look back the last 70 years and the way we've gone about it, it was for commercial gain, for profit. We've got most forest, high graded, as in go in there and take out the most valuable trees to make the most money out of and that's going to degrade the quality of the forest which is then massively degraded today

Additionally, forestry is reported to have negative impacts on forestry environments. The list includes:

- Poor management of extraction
- Introduction of inappropriate species
- Impacted the intensity of fires due to management of the forest
- Species changes
- Soil erosion that has led to flooding
- Weeds
- Feral animals

Key opinion leaders

I'm not against forestry but I think that what I see and the impacts of most of the forestry are really bad. We've seen really poor management and over extraction and inappropriate introduction of species in places. Definitely a lot of damage has been done and that has also caused a whole heap of other cascading impacts like fire regimes have been altered dramatically by structural changes and species changes in forests. Now we're seeing more extreme fires in forests than we would have seen if they weren't under forestry management ever

The other side of it as well is degradation of hydrology and impacts like soil erosion and the cascading impacts of flooding and we could talk about weeds, and we could talk about ferals as well. Forestry has had a massive impact

There is a perception the forests are in dire need of restoration and this can only happen if native forestry is discontinued. The assertion is the forests have been mismanaged, animals have suffered and the forests need to be protected.

We need to realise the size of the problem. The utopia is not to stop logging alone, the utopia is to generate community engage management plans. To get in those forests, to start assessing them properly. To look at what we need to do to turn them back into forests so that they've got these life-giving properties to regenerate them, to manage them, to protect them, to study them, to watch the animals and the life come back. For people to make passive incomes from them because you can through new and creative health based and culture placed industry

Fifteen years ago the tighter controls were introduced on native forestry practices to stop excessive harvesting, particularly on private properties. This has not been enough time to allow the forests and the lands to regenerate. Tighter restrictions need to be put in place for the forests to return to their original state.

There is Private Native Forestry that is happening, it is regulated, it needs to be regulated better but we have started regulating. You've got to remember it was only 15 years ago we weren't regulating it at all, there were no rules around Private Native Forestry, you could just log whatever you wanted. The only reason people didn't was because we were selling it for chips, we were selling timber for virtually nothing

The final argument for the degradation of forests that the forestry industry has been responsible for is the lack of diversity within the forests. There is the belief the majority of State forests are actually hardwood plantations based on the continuous logging in the past and this is not an acceptable position.

It's not a healthy forest estate and for centuries now the management of that estate has been very poor, and we are literally seeing a decrease in the biodiversity and healthy values of the forest. What we're seeing in public forests is much more like timber stands, becoming more and more every logging cycle more like making these forests into plantations as opposed to what a fully functioning forest is with multi layers, canopy, under storey etcetera

Forestry occurs in prime forestry locations

Even though it was acknowledged the amount of land available for native forestry is small, those opposed to native forestry believe it is not the size of the area, but the location of areas which forestry can access. The locations the industry has access to are reported to be prime native forests that are central to the overall health of the forest. Until forestry is no longer able to occur as it will deny the forests the opportunity to return to their original state.

No, I believe that, I totally believe that. It is a very small area that we're still managing but it also happens to be one of the most important areas left for biodiversity, for landscape resilience, to turn things around, to regenerate them, for carbon sequestration

I remember this beautiful psychiatrist saying to me, who was fighting coal seam gas, the industry was saying, it's less than 0.5% of the landscape that we are impacting, even though it was impacting the water table and everything else because everything is connected. He said, that's like telling me it's okay, the bullet only impacted 0.5% of the body, it just so happened to be that part of the brain that killed you. There are equations and measures, but it all needs to be put into the broader context

Forestry Corporation failures

There is an assertion the Forestry Corporation is mismanaging the State forests. It is believed the Forestry Corporation have knowingly removed older mature trees which is problematic because these trees are essential to the entire ecosystem of a forest.

Those old mature forests contain bigger trees that have lots of hollows and they're also, they contain more nectar when they flower, provide more habitat and useable, they are really important. These mature forests, older forests are better at providing habitat for a collection of species

Forestry Corporation was accused of not just taking out smaller trees, but taking out trees that are koala habitats. This is considered negligent, contributing to the degradation of the forest and denying koalas their habitats.

I literally went to a forest compartment two months ago that we're about to log, I've been looking at forests for 35 years and logging operations, I could not believe my eyes at what trees were going to take out, they're tiny. There is no valuable timber in those trees that we're about to take out. But what they are is actually koala habitat, a koala habitat for a tiny population of koalas that is trying to survive after the fires. We saw reduced evidence that koalas live in these trees

It is also asserted the Forestry Corporation is logging/harvesting the forests prematurely and this too is having an impact of the forestry ecosystem.

What's becoming clearer and clearer is people are more connected and more educated about what a forest can look like, should look like etcetera. The more that the Forestry Corporation has managed these forests and the shorter logging cycles that

Key opinion leaders

we're experiencing the more we're seeing what forests no longer are what forests should be

We get the experience of people saying, my god the trees are so small what could they be used for because this cutting cycle is a bit more frequent than the last, there is no more big trees that we're taking out anymore because they've mostly gone compared to once upon a time where we had big, big trees

It is believed the logging cycles are shorter and even those that are in excess of 50 years, are still having an impact on the forest and should not be allowed.

Whilst even some of those are regrowth forests, because they've been logged 50, 60 or 70 years ago, even the 50 year old plus forest still have a lot of those important habitat features, the hollows and the mature trees that provide an important habitat

Forestry Corporation is accused of harvesting and then letting the forest effectively 'fend for itself' to regrow and repair. Those making these accusations feel this is not sustainable forestry and should be stopped.

I think people when they, a lot of the community that is engaged in the forest conversation, understands that the Forestry Corporation's management method is go in and log and then walk away and we'll let it regrow. No other resource project, no other farming, no other agriculture involves just being able to walk away from public land

Forestry Corporation is considered to be expensive to operate. It is viewed as an expense to the taxpayer and the only group making money from 'destroying the habitat' are those in the timber industry.

At the end of the day the older a forest is the better it can function as a carbon drawdown and sequestrator. We're just at that point where the community is really aware of this stuff. The onset of climate evidence and climate scientist, the international scientific community telling us that we've got to stop cutting down native vegetation and the very fact that it's costing taxpayers right now money to log is we're at an all-time absurdity

Public land

State forests are considered to be forests that belong to the public and therefore should not be a working forest. There is the opinion that there is only a minimal amount of forest left and this should be properly preserved.

What we've done is just cut the forest and cut again, we've cut, and we've cut and that's why we don't have forests like what we had when we first started logging. Which are these giant forests with massive incredible quality timbers. Those days are over, we need to accept that, we've changed that. We've gone through the landscape at radical rates, we've over cleared the landscape and our Public Forest Estate is the little bit that's left

Key opinion leaders

It is not clear to those opposing the native forestry industry why public land is available to a small number of individuals and companies to make money when the industry, they claim, does not make any money for the general good of society. There is an expectation by these KOLs that the forests should be preserved for the future generations.

Agriculture we know that realistically speaking, if we're harvesting a product you're meant to have grown it first whereas what we're talking about here with forests is actually public land, it's a public asset and some people, only a very small handful of quite wealthy machine operators are making a profit from extracting the resource from these public forests which we now know are worth more standing

These forests belong to all people, they belong to the community, it's crown land. They belong to future generations. We're meant to be managing this on behalf of everyone and right now we lock these forests up, we let four blokes on giant \$750,000 machines in there, take timber out and then not returning money to the state

Prevent extinction

The belief that many species of animals are close to extinction is one that is paramount to the argument that native forestry should be discontinued. This goes beyond the koalas although koalas are often central to the argument. The belief is based on the argument that areas are being logged/harvested in cycles that are too short, the deterioration of the environment is leading to the absence of wildlife.

We see it as a fairly quick fix to immediately addressing some of the threatened species decline. For example, the greater glider, even the koala on the north coast which obviously I'm sure you've heard a lot about. And also species like swift parrot or Gang-gang on the south coast

One is they see a forest; they may have lived alongside it for 40 or 50 years, it hasn't been logged in that period or it might have been logged once, they come back and log again within that 40 years or 30 years or sometimes less cycle. What they see is the creek flowing dirty after the logging operation has happened, they then don't see or hear the animals, we're talking about forest dependent animals here, the threatened species and we're talking about the ones that are literally on the brink of extinction. People will say that we're not hearing koalas like we were or we're not hearing the gliders as we once were or we can't hear the owls or in some cases some people would say, thank goodness we can still hear some evidence, so it gets to be that very raw experience of actually understanding the very thing the animals needed have been taken away, namely the habitat trees

Koalas are believed to be on the brink of extinction for some KOLs. By holding this belief, there is no alternative but to stop native forestry to allow the koala population to regenerate.

The main primary concern is protecting the key koala habitat in NSW. Obviously it will have an impact on forestry in NSW given its size and where it is

Key opinion leaders

Our koalas are currently so threatened they're endangered. That's about the highest conservation status you can get before critically endangered, then the next one is extinct, disappeared

These KOLs hope the forestry industry respect the rules in place about protecting koalas.

The laws are meant to protect these animals from becoming critically endangered. Right now, if I'm a logger I don't even have to look in the tree that I'm about to cut down in case there is a koala at the top of it. I could cut down that tree and that koala I could kill it accidentally. The fact is we hope, and we assume that loggers are a bit more gentle and kind and caring and won't do that. I don't think that's necessarily the case but that's our law when it comes to forestry

Logging is unhealthy to the local environment

Logging not only affects the forest, but it also has an impact on those who live near the forest. It has an impact on the local environment which then impacts on local creeks which are shared by those who live close by.

I hear the experience, it will be the biodiversity, the water, the change in water quality that might run from a logging operation remembering eroding and all those sorts of things happen, they go over creeks so the creek might flow dirty. Often again these communities are either sharing the same creek or water source or they frequent it etcetera, so they get that real close view of it

Hardwood is undervalued and wasted

There is a belief that the uses of hardwood are not adding any value to the world and can easily be replaced by pinewood. The wood is sold too cheaply and the damage that occurs in the collection process is unacceptably detrimental to the environment.

Of course, the products that we're getting out of the forest are incredibly low value products. We're dealing with fence posts, telegraph poles, girders, pallets and wood chips or paper and yes we've got a very small volume of our Public Forest Estate is going to very high end bespoke flooring and it's not construction timber, it's not products that we need, and we know the plantation estate is where forests should come from

We're talking about the North East up here, it might be a logging operation that is literally going to firewood, fence posts and some pallets and that is where people once they learn this people start to get really upset and go, hang on I thought that these were products that were essential to humans, viable etcetera, there are alternative products for this

Government inaction

There is a lack of respect of the way the state government(s) have managed the forestry industry. There is the assertion that state government(s) have ignored the abundance of

scientific evidence and chosen to promote inaccurate science to keep the native forestry industry operating. The government is accused of promoting inaccurate information about forestry and koalas.

As new evidence comes on what we've seen particularly in NSW over the last 12 years is the politics has been self-serving and all of the research has been mostly generated to provide a justification for the continued logging of the Public Forest Estate

Our Minister for Forests last year in NSW stood in the NSW parliament and said, logging forests is good for climate change because the younger the forest the more sequestration that will happen more rapidly, that's not what the science says. But he stood up and said it. He also said, it's great for koalas because the koalas love the young trees, that's not what the science says, but that's how intractable the kind of politics and the forest wars still are. Real leadership will hopefully take us to a better place

17.5.3 Outcomes

The outcomes those opposed to the native forestry industry would like in order to make the pathway available for the industry to be discontinued are:

- Native forestry to cease by 2030
- Government follows the advice of the science that is being produced by academics and universities
- Encourage those who live in the forests to be involved in the discussions
- First Nations, community leaders, fire fighters, National Parks, invasive species controllers, young people and policy makers to be 'around the table' to come up with policies that will help manage the State forests
- The timber industry 'table' needs to be one where those in the industry who support logging/harvesting share their views with people who can help them understand the science behind the reasons why the industry needs to be closed. At this table they will be supported to help them adjust in 'terms of their employment, their families, their mental health their well-being'
- The government needs to acquire more land through land acquisition programs so more trees can be grown
- The private native forests will need to develop but in a different direction to the current one
- Agriculture needs to be better educated on how to manage their land and the ecosystems
- Tourism needs to be involved
- Those who no longer work in the native forestry industry can re-train and be involved in new industries that will emerge, such as tourism or conservation of National Parks and reserves. Support packages will need to be offered to those who will need to go through the process of re-training

At the same time, I also understand that people that want to see the end of logging the Public Forest Estate are really supportive about helping the transition. They want people who are, whether they're skilled machine operators to be re-engaged in landscape work elsewhere, whether it's regenerating, whether it's helping in disaster response and management and of course building the plantation sector. That's where I see things

17.5.4 Confidence in industry closure

This section is the opinion of one person from the environmental movement. It may not represent all opinions. This participant was asked how confident they were about the industry being discontinued. Their response to this question was:

- The success of the closure of the industry in Victoria and Western Australia has provided a strong indication that there is an appetite by government to close native forestry. This demonstrates species are under threat; there is little or no forest left to harvest in these areas

In Victoria there are particular laws around some threatened species, those laws were making it to the point where it was becoming very difficult for the forestry corporation to actually log in accordance with the law and that's why those court cases kept coming and coming and kept stopping logging operations because forestry was breaking the law. Dan Andrews said, alright we're going to end Native Forest logging by 2030, he brought that decision ahead because the other fact is, there is barely any timber left in these forests

- There is confidence the federal government is also sympathetic to looking at the sustainability of the native forestry industry and will become involved in the discussion. It is believed they will apply pressure for the industry to be discontinued
- There are currently Federal Court challenges by the North East Forestry Alliance organisation challenging the North East Regional Forestry Agreement

The federal developments are pretty significant and if Plibersek and the federal government decide to make some of those changes, the Samuels review into the EPBC Act, around the RFA's. They will have huge implications for logging in NSW and the way I can't really see how it will still be viable in any sort of sense after that

- It is believed there is strong public support for the discontinuation of the native forestry industry and this public support will also apply pressure on the industry

I think there is also a growing movement and appetite in the state, there is an awareness of this issue, there hasn't been for a long time. I think it is becoming the primary conservation issue in the state. Obviously that is work that we'll be looking at, continuing the awareness around it is growing

- Wildlife will become almost extinct so governments will have to act

In Victoria, the way it has petered out or ended was due to this court case regarding the Leadbeater's possum that ended logging for six months

17.5.5 Alternate uses for forests

Summary

KOLs who do not support native forestry made some suggestions about the better uses in the future for the forests.

There suggestions focussed on:

- Tourism
- Education programs
- Activities: mountain bike riding, camping

Other uses

Engaging with nature is viewed by these KOLs as being important for many reasons. Not only does it offer a physical experience but has the additional benefit of improving mental health. It is believed there is currently high public demand for this.

We need to be offering more options and alternatives to our community because we know the health advantages and health benefits including the budgetary reality of health returns where people have public lands to go to, experience, camp, engage in recreation, we know that's what our community absolutely needs and demands. That is what communities are needing and demanding

These KOLs feel the State forests should be used for recreational purposes and by doing this, it will take the pressure off the National Parks and allow them to continue to regenerate without disturbance.

I think we could be letting on the edges of those forests; we should be encouraging tourism operators and passive recreation as well as more intensive recreation. These are the things, of course as well these forests, the more we regenerate and the more we build their resilience and keep them moist as opposed to drying them out through logging

Whereas our state forests and the logging of state, actually there is already a lot of roads, there is a lot of tracks, there is a lot of damage, there is a lot of harm. We should be integrating recreation into those areas and take the pressure off the National Park Estate. We should be building campgrounds and we should have tree planting programs and regeneration programs

There is a belief the broader communities are interested in going out into the forests and enjoying the natural environment that it provides. People should be encouraged to engage but they will only engage if the offers are interesting.

One is they are these incredible places of recreation and gathering. People want to go to the natural environment, and they want to do it more and more

Key opinion leaders

Tourism is the obvious and most acceptable use of the State forests.

The Public Forest Estate even though it would only add 1.8% to the protected area network we should be relying on that to actually regenerate. We should be giving our communities a reason to go to these forests, we should be having living tourism experiences. We know cutting edge tourism at the moment is in place-based real life

The types of tourist experiences KOLs thought might attract visitors are mountain bike riding, camping (even glamping). There is also room for educational programs.

That can also be through education about landscape resilience, we can have school programs, school projects. We can literally connect people better to understanding how their environment functions, how we get clean water

One KOL referred to the parks in America which was described as 'brilliant'. Modelling the State Parks on these is thought to be beneficial to the community.

Touching on National Parks, I'm sure you've seen, the National Parks system in America is brilliant. They commercialise it and get people in them, love them and appreciate them. We lock them up and no-one can go through

17.6 Native forestry - sustainable

17.6.1 Summary

Those who support native forestry believe it is a viable and robust industry that provides many benefits beyond an economic contribution. Those close to the Forestry Corporation believes its intention is to preserve the forests but also to ensure the working forest component is cultivated in as sustainable a way as possible. There is a belief the approach used in Australia is world class. These KOLs discussed the science they base their work on. They are passionate about the forests they are responsible for and strive to ensure the forests will be robust for future generations.

Those who took part in this research that are connected to or have observed the way Forestry Corporation operates, and are positive about the native forestry industry, all believe in the integrity and direction Forestry Corporation is taking. They often feel overwhelmed by the negative attitudes towards them and there is frustration there are few avenues available to them to defend themselves.

The message all KOLs who support native forestry want the public and politicians to understand is their approach to forestry is sustainable, based on science, respect of the environment they work in and that those who work in the industry are dedicated to ensuring the forests are healthy and sustainable. Underpinning all the decisions Forestry Corporation makes, and one the broader industry also subscribes to, is if the forests are not managed well, are not sustainable, if wildlife and species are affected, the industry cannot operate.

The strengths of the native forestry industry are discussed in terms of:

- Forestry Corporation values
- Economic contribution
- Best practice approach
- Dedicated staff

17.6.2 Forestry Corporation values

Those who work or are connected to the Forestry Corporation believe it is an organisation of high standards and values. They are proud to work in an industry that produces products people need and value and that are in high demand. They are conscious their work needs to be 'exemplary' and undertaken to the best of their ability otherwise they are open to criticism.

That means that we need to make sure that the areas are appropriately audited as well. Being a forester and going in and saying how great are we, we did a great job isn't enough. You almost need to have the EPA coming in behind them and saying you've met all the milestones; you've ticked all the boxes because that will give it credibility beyond that we have at the moment

Key opinion leaders

Forestry Corporation, to their credit, presented the position that while they are always striving for the best scientific approach, mistakes will be made but like any profession, they learn from these mistakes. They feel they are a self-aware organisation that, particularly over the past twenty years, has continued to grow and learn how to improve the services they deliver.

It's evolving, it's changing, it's improving, we believe it's improving on a scientifically measured basis. Are we doing everything perfect today, to the best of our knowledge our intention is to do everything perfect but there will always be a human factor in there. It's a bit like logging sometimes logging doesn't quite remain within the boundaries it's supposed to because you've got a thick wooded area and there is a boundary drawn on a map. It's really quite difficult. We use satellites but you know from driving around in a car sometimes the satellite puts you in the wrong place

Forestry Corporation according to those working for the organisation and those standing outside discussed the merits of Forestry Corporations approach of not responding to the criticisms it receives. Responding to statements or theories that Forestry Corporation considers false, inaccurate and/or politically motivated to wound has been thought to be a poor strategy; it is difficult to argue with logic with those who are only interested in an emotional argument.

The difficulty and frustration, for some KOLs, is by not responding the public are being influenced by those who are only presenting a negative impression of Forestry Corporation and the values it is working towards. There is concern these outside voices are heavily influencing at a public and political level and could bring the industry to a standstill.

It is quite frustrating that Forest Corp as a government, they are a government owned independent trading operation, although that is meant to free them up to act like a corporation, a lot of the time they just don't respond to stuff, like issues in the media. That tends to, in my mind, allow these things to fester or people are only ever being presented with one side of the argument

For a long, long time the logic has been don't respond because you're going to make it worse, it will go away. Of course, it does go away but then there is the next one and next one and people are just getting a drip feed of here is another problem relating to forestry and the overall impression to me is that forestry is a problem

There is concern that if the only positive story about Forestry Corporation is their firefighting abilities, then the true work they do, conservation, managing the state forests so they are accessible to the public in addition to supplying hardwood timber, are not acknowledged and therefore, never presented to help those outside of the industry understand the contribution it is making.

There is the occasional positive story about our organisation but it tends to be our role in firefighting or it might be about an event that is being held in the forest or something like that. Typically it's not positive about what we do in terms of timber production

Key opinion leaders

The media is also considered to hold a deep bias against Forestry Corporation. The media rarely, if ever, presents a story that demonstrates the true contribution Forest Corporation makes. Those who are asked to speak on behalf of Forestry Corporation are given minimal time and are only ever asked to defend themselves, never given the opportunity to discuss their other contributions.

And the best we can ever hope in that is that we will be the one at the bottom end of it I've come to realise over the years interacting with the media that there is no way to sort of bend a story to your will because they kind of come in and they have the story board already about this person says this we are going to show a photo of this and then at the end we'll give the opportunity for right of reply. And it doesn't matter how articulate you are or how fantastic your point is that will be what you do and it will be 10 to 15 seconds long at most and so you are just trained to say what would likely fit in that 10 to 15 seconds. It's pretty darn frustrating but it is what it is, it's just a process it's what it is and it's a bit cynical but it's just what it is

Additionally, it is problematic for Forestry Corporation to defend themselves as they do not employ someone who is responsible for addressing the media or speaking on behalf of Forestry Corporation; nor is it in their budget to mount campaigns to promote themselves in a positive way.

The values of Forestry Corporation are strong and there is belief in their process, but there is a feeling by some they are fighting an unfair game which does not allow them to provide their truth towards native forestry.

We just don't have capacity and our organisation being a State-owned corporation that is operational in its focus and not policy in its focus

No, but we're also not allowed to ... we can't go out and we can't sell ourselves really, if we wanted to do advertising campaign anything over the cost of \$25,000 would have to go via ministerial office

I would love to be able to do more that sort of science communicated kind of stuff but really when you are in a State-owned corporation you just don't get the opportunity to do that kind of thing and we're not supposed to put our heads too much above

17.6.3 Positive economic contribution

Australia could be a productive exporter

- Currently Australia is a net importer of timber and the trade deficit according to one KOL is over \$3.8 billion. If production of hardwood timber is to stop, it is believed this figure will increase.
- Some KOLs believe there is more opportunity for forestry in Australia and a valuable opportunity is being missed by not increasing the production of timber. The percentage of the forest that is used for native harvesting is small considering the amount of money it generates

Key opinion leaders

It's less than 1% of the forest that we have set aside for timber production, less than 1% of the stuff we put aside. When we then put it across the percentage of forest in Australia it's a fraction of a fraction of 1%, it's a very small area that we're impacting on. We're impacting on them and we're supporting \$2 billion worth of enterprise. If there is something that can come back and put \$2 billion into our economy while shutting down the forest industry, shutting down a whole lot of towns I don't know what it is and it's not tourism

Contribution to the North East NSW Coast economy

- A figure was provided by one KOL who believes the industry is worth 2.3 billion to the North Coast. This KOL said this figure is supported by a survey independent consultants Price Waterhouse Cooper conducted.

Additional employment

- Many KOLs discussed the frustration they feel when the industry is economically assessed only by the inclusion of those who are directly employed in the industry. These KOLs feel this is an unfair criticism as it does not take into account the flow-on employment and economic activity created as a result of the native forestry industry

If you were to look at it from a purely numbers of jobs point of view there are other industries that are bigger and I think sometimes we do get too focused on the jobs. Definitely there are jobs and as you say it's not just the jobs that are employed by the mills and by the sector, there is all the servicing of their machinery, all the different flow-on effects that every other industry has. The most important reason that it's valuable is the actual resource itself

Forestry Corporation - financial contribution

It is asserted by those who do not support native forestry that Forestry Corporation is a cost to the public purse. It costs money to fund and all it achieves is degrading the forest further by logging/harvesting. The softwood sector is a profitable industry whereas Forestry Corporation is a loss-making agency. Forestry Corporation without being subsidized will not be financially viable and will need to be closed. For these KOLs funding Forestry Corporation is futile.

87% of timber use is coming from the plantation estate then they learn that in the last two financial years it was \$28 million lost to the NSW taxpayers whereas in the same period of time there was \$92 million returned from the softwood sector, the plantation estate

These arguments are strongly refuted by those in the industry.

The counter arguments given by those who support Forestry Corporation are:

- The arguments do not take into account the following costs Forestry Corporation also has to cover:

Key opinion leaders

- Managing conservation forests
- Funding and supporting a firefighting workforce
- Other expenses that are associated with forest management such as maintaining roads, public spaces and general maintenance

Forest Corp doesn't make any money, I would suggest that Forest Corp make good money. Forest Corp should run two balance sheets. It should run its production forest business and then it should run its social good business. On the production forest business, they make money. When you put them into the social good, they manage parks, they manage campgrounds, they manage a whole lot of roads, a lot of the roads that the forest service does are to keep roads open, they only need those roads open for about a six-week period every 25 years but they keep those roads open for the other 24 years and pay for it

All the campgrounds they maintain that costs money, by the time you separate the forest management activities from the social good activities, fire management sits across both of those. When people go they cost money, I go do they really and if they weren't there who would be paying for all that road maintenance, who would be paying for all those fire suppression activities and the weed and pest management it would be the taxpayer of the state

- The money earned from harvesting timber would be money that would then have to be found in order to run and maintain the State forests

I guess the other thing that a lot of people don't understand is that if Forestry Corp isn't managing the forest with some of the timber revenues and some assistance from government then all of that cost goes onto the taxpayer. People think Forestry Corp is taxpayer subsidised well actually the timber industry's funding a lot of the plan management that happens for the public and government provides a bit but nowhere near as much as it does for any other public land manager

We actually sit right in the middle of that and they can try and add up the last 12 years and say well you've been subsidised to 100 million dollars over that time but that's the total sum cost of all our land activities over that time, so we do receive a certain grant from Governments about 11 million dollars a year and that pays for roads for public access and bridges and some picnic facilities and this sort of stuff pretty basic stuff. So that call it 10 million dollars for the sake of mathematics is what we get a year for managing two million hectares

But the thing about the economic picture around the industry is that we're irrelevant like we sit on that line between profit losses we're basically there is no big gain or loss with us we're pretty much break even

- There is frustration about the economic viability of State forests for these KOLs when the cost is spoken about in terms of being a drain on the public purse whereas National Parks that produce little to no income are never discussed. They consider National Parks to be a much greater economic drain than the State forests.

Key opinion leaders

There's a much larger cost and National Parks are significantly more expensive to manage than State Forest and yet less visitors per annum and have less diversity and opportunity for people. A lot of that sort of information isn't well understood either National Parks and Wildlife service their budget is in excess of half a billion dollars a year to do what they do? Now that is never considered to be a subsidy

17.6.4 Best practices approach

Forestry Corporation representatives spoke at length about their approach to native forestry and would like this to be part of the report in the hope that anyone who reads it can understand the lengths the organisation goes to, to ensure that best practice techniques are being used. They want the public and politicians to understand the science, the dedication and care that is undertaken.

Approach to forestry

The approach described about the plan for an area to be harvested was broken down into the following stages by one KOL. They described this as an extensive process that requires much thought and consideration, as well as a science-based approach.

- 10 years prior to a harvest the following happens
 - A calculation is made about how much volume is in the area that can be supplied to the local mills
 - Work out which forests are involved
 - Measure the trees
 - Work out which trees will mature at the right time
 - Work out how much volume they will get from the harvesting
 - Next 10 years continuous surveys to determine what plants and animals occur on the site
 - This is done by ecologists
 - They use GPS trackers so it can be seen where they have walked in the forest
 - They mark the trees and these can be easily seen and it is noted whether it's a habitat tree that has to be saved or a koala tree or one suitable for harvesting
 - They use iPads, the data is live and using this they can work out how much volume they can get from that forest
 - It is not clear felling
 - A lot of work goes into what can be taken and what needs to stay
 - The machinery is GPS tracked so it can be seen where the machine has gone
 - Every worker onsite is GPS tracked
 - The EPA can watch it all in real time

Additionally, a forester will undertake the following:

- Light thinning
- Silviculture practices (a management system for areas of woodlands) which take into account the age and species within the forest as well as aspects like the waterways
- Excess and unhealthy trees are taken out; too many trees do not make for healthy forest and unhealthy trees lead to the degradation of the forest

Forestry Corporation understands the need for future planning of State forests. The 100-year planning approach was discussed. This plan involves modelling the projected needs of timber of the next 100 years. It is constantly being updated and underpins the forestry activities undertaken.

The 100-year plan includes the following:

- The forest is constantly being measured
 - This includes sampling plots
- The plots provide information about the kinds of trees that are growing, what kinds of products are in them and how they are growing
- This information is added to the forest inventory
- Growth models are in places which provides information to Forestry Corporation about future expectations
- They use the simulation models to understand what the forest can look like in 100 years' time and can create scenarios which they can test to see what impact the scenario might have on the forest

Those working in the native forestry are ultimately trying to produce timber of species that are needed and in demand, while keeping in mind and acting on the sustainability of the species within the forest. It is complicated and requires organisation, something these KOLs think is often not known about, much less understood.

It's not just wood it's actually logs of a certain quality of certain species so we need to know we have ongoing supply of blackbutt, spotted gum and all the other species and we're actually internal to that model we want it to be sustainable across the whole of the estate all of the species and all of the wood products we currently have

When we go out to an area to harvest timber we actually put in years' worth of planning to what can and can't be done to achieve ecologically sustainable forest management. It's complex stuff

Forestry Corporation rejects the concept native timber is harvested and the areas is forgotten and left to regenerate on its own accord. There is intervention, monitoring and contribution to the inventory. Forestry Corporation believes in its forestry practice it uses, with best practice the goal.

Key opinion leaders

I think our production forests are, it's not a set and forget management strategy we operate them under, it's a perpetual learning path and as we learn to do things better operations change

The code of practice for all the forests in NSW was updated two years ago I believe; these things evolve over time. What we are doing today is different from what we were doing 10 years ago which is hugely different from what we were doing 50 years ago

Forestry Corporation would appreciate the feedback from anyone who knows of an area that has been mismanaged or is currently degraded.

Anywhere that people are saying that the forest is being degraded by harvesting and we're not getting good stuff coming back I'm sure the forester, the state forester would love to know those areas because they would go and try and remediate that to try and figure out what they can do to get the quality that they need back. A lot of the burns after harvest are aimed at exactly that, to avoid weed species and to actually put a seed bed down for the species that they want to come through

17.6.5 Dedicated staff

Those interviewed in this research described themselves and those who work in the industry as being passionate about the forest. They believe that as much is given back to the forest as is taken. These KOLs do not see Forestry Corporation's role as simply taking timber from the forest.

KOLs spoke about the relationship most foresters have with the environment they work in. They enjoy the diversity and the many ecological decisions that must be made, such as the quality of the flora and fauna and how that is to be managed. They take care in determining where the wildlife is and how they can best survive and stay in the forest.

KOLs feel those who work in the forest see this pathway as a lifelong career. Being outside, caring for a forest, creating products and ultimately selling the products are all aspects of the industry and ones those within the industry enjoy being part of.

I think like any industry there is a range there, most people that I know in the industry they believe in it passionately, it doesn't tend to be something that you just come to lightly. Most people are in it for a long time, you get the odd shooting comet that comes in and leaves but don't seem to last very long

17.6.6 General issues for the industry

Summary

The native forestry industry, aside from the conservation movement wanting the industry to cease operation, has some additional issues that it needs to consider when contemplating its social licence to operate.

Key opinion leaders

Throughout the interview comments were made by those supporting native forestry that are relevant to this topic and are reported in this section.

Key issues/topics in this section include:

- Impact on communities
- Public relations
- Leadership
- Future planning

Wildlife habitats

All KOLs interviewed in this research value the life of an animal and respect the processes in place to provide a safe habitat for them. As discussed, the Forestry Corporation conduct extensive research not just for koalas but for the wildlife living within their forests. The intention is to protect the species and play a role in allowing each species to flourish.

Wildlife are a cause for concern for those working in forestry. The biggest problem is even if new forests are grown, wildlife will develop habitats; the moment a habitat is formed the forest has to undergo the same stringent (and costly) processes currently in place.

Plantations are great but then all we end up is everybody that is against an animal dying, they don't always die to be fair, they move into the plantations and then you're not allowed to touch them anyway. It will never end; you could plant a billion trees and then habitat is going to live in there and they're going to want to save the trees too and then they'll become carbon offset

Lack of connection to forestry

An observation was articulated by one KOL about those who are making decisions and their lack of connection to the land and forestry. Many who are advisors are thought to be young, inexperienced and not from a rural background and most, if not all, are from the city. The KOL was not criticising them but more making the observation that it is difficult to decide on policy without having a connection that involves having been to the forest and spent some time in it and talking about it with those who are working in the forest. This would be ideal and also a minimum of background research for decision-makers to fully understand the issues would be helpful.

These days there is such a wider disconnect between where things come from and how they end up on our supermarket shelves in your furniture stores or whatever it might be. Those people, the ones who are becoming decision makers not only at the ballot box that's one thing, but even in the bureaucracy who advise ministers. Some of these kids, and I call them kids, a lot of them are in their early 20s, they've come straight out of a Poli Sci degree at one of the majors and essentially they think they know everything about the world. They've never really been outside Sydney, they've never

Key opinion leaders

seen what a forest looks like, they don't know what the methodology is, they haven't grown up around them like we have

Unreasonable criticism

KOLs feel the unrelenting and unfair criticism of the industry puts those working in the industry under immense pressure. From a forester point of view, they are doing their best to ensure all the processes and procedures are followed and appreciate why they are in place. The level of scrutiny they are under means that even the smallest of errors are turned into an issue, even those that are difficult to control.

There is and I'll give you an example, someone came to me the other week and said, did you know Forest Corp got a fine for clearing x y and z extra and I looked into it. They have gone outside their boundary 5 trees, and it is five trees, it might have been smaller in size than my office. Ultimately we know that has very, very little impact. Fair enough they shouldn't have done it but it's not as big of an issue as what they're making in their own head

These KOLs understand they need to be careful and they also understand the damage that can be done by making a mistake.

Of course. I think one thing, that mistakes happen but every breach that Forestry workers do in the forest becomes a major issue and so they definitely have to make sure they have to find ways to minimise and reduce those as much as possible. And they do happen from time to time but that's just so damaging every time a single contractor cuts down a wrong tree or a giant tree or something, they just can't afford those mistakes. It's too perilous right now to be losing things over one tree that should really have been protected

Fair media

It is the opinion of all those who support native forestry that the media is unfair and biased in the way it reports on any topics associated with this industry. It is rare for an article to appear in the press or television outlets that gives forestry any chance to explain what they are doing and how they go about it. The only good publicity they receive is when there is a fire or a 'timber festival'.

Other people have their knowledge and awareness of the industry comes from sources like the local free daily paper that sort of stuff. I know the one here in Coffs Harbour it is every single paper has a story about anti forestry activities, it's never balanced with any other views or other stories. Except when they have a timber festival here they talk about how great it is that everyone gets out to this timber festival. That local media seems to be incredibly biased, their ability to get proper information into an area where it is dominated by things that are much the alternate view is much more newsworthy than presenting the facts and the truth about forestry. That is a real challenge for the industry I think

Key opinion leaders

Leadership

One KOL feels Timber NSW could be more proactive in representing the industry. They described Timber NSW approach as being lacklustre. They feel the information on their website is out of date, their media releases are often negative and their negotiations skills are poor. They do not find Timber NSW to be an effective association.

Timber NSW exists and just before this I thought I'll just get onto their website and have a look and I think the latest information is 2017; I think they only ever come out when they want to attack the Government or make some sort of negative sort of statement. I think really having dealt with a lot of industry associations over the years it's probably the least effective one I've ever seen

Another KOL somewhat supported the previous comment. They would like to see Timber NSW be more proactive with government, find solutions rather than make media statements, and have strong representatives who can speak for the industry in a positive and meaningful way.

They're able to understand the approaches the Governments work with that look to cooperate and collaborate rather than just attack and criticise. Know how to work things behind the scenes not so much just go straight to a media statement. Being able to just ... it can come down to personalities too, I think they have struggled in terms of their personalities there as well but resourcing always helps them, there is a lot to their roles knowing how to represent their members in the best lines and manage issues or anticipating issues the Government's going to have to deal with and find solutions for them

One KOL thought it would be good if there was just one association instead of two; Timber NSW and the Forest Products Association. The issues might be different for both associations but there is better strength in being unified than in being separate.

I think the industry as a whole has two separate bodies in NSW there's the Forest Products Association who deal mostly with the pine and softwood plantations side of things and Timber NSW, and having two associations often doesn't work very well unless they put their heads together regularly and work well together. Often Government finds a much easier if they are doing a reform or something different to have two industries associations with different views because then you can just pick your path

Future planning

Thinking about the future and where the industry going is difficult, given the current insecurities around Forestry Corporation beyond 2028. Those who are optimistic feel as many trees should be planted as possible. Their rationale is if there are plenty of trees, then no matter how many habitats there are, there still will be enough trees to be harvested.

We need to get a proper plantation program up and running quick smart but again we will actually get to use that material in 50 or 60 years at full maturity or will it be knocked up for carbon offsetting and because an animal has moved in. Will it actually

Key opinion leaders

be farming trees for material required by communities; I don't know that it will actually go that way. Still no issue with planting a heap of trees, even if it was for example a bit of a trade-off. Let's plant ten times the amount of trees per year, as actually harvesting within those compartments that we're regrowing anyway, more homes for habitat so we're allowed to do compartment tree farming within State Forest

Fair assessment of forestry health

One participant referred to a code that was introduced in 2022 which appeared to be an update on a code that was introduced 14 years prior. The KOL was reflecting that while it is important to have a code, not all forests are the same and there needs to be some flexibility if the forests are to be managed successfully. The code will work for some forests but not others and at its worst, it is possible for the code to harm a forest. This KOL believes the code should be reviewed.

On point we really need to do, what's happened since the new code came out last year after 14 years we had a code of practice, a new one came out with a few smaller changes in the code for example, that's one thing that still needs to be looked at, the codes. You can't take one code of practice and apply it to a forest; they are all in different conditions and different price types they have. They've made the same rules apply to all of north coast forest, Northern NSW Forest. Different forest types in different conditions, they are leaving too much H&R trees, habitat and recruitment trees but they've got too low basal count which is the actual minimum tree retention count required. What that really allows is loggers can go in there and leave more of the unhealthy trees behind, even though you do want them for habitat and recruitment trees of course, but they can take out too many trees in general out of a healthy forest. They can actually ruin a forest using the code

'Red tape'

Compliance creates paperwork. One KOL discussed how their local land services team working in the PNF area has grown from 5 to 35 staff, but now have fallen behind in their paperwork; it takes seven months to get an approval when it used to take three. This KOL believes the problem with approvals being delayed is pressure is applied to the industry and compromises such as over-logging and poor tree selection in some areas.

All this extra paperwork on compliance didn't change, all these people sit in the office say let's do all this paperwork and it will fix it. They've grown the local land services team which is there for Private Native Forestry from 5 staff to 35 staff in Private Native Forestry and now they've fallen behind on their paperwork because it takes 7 months to get an approval when it used to take 3. That puts a lot of pressure on the industry in its own right, it creates over logging in certain areas because you couldn't get your approvals in time in other areas, and we'll go back and log something that has already got an approval because we couldn't get the approval

Key opinion leaders

Communities will close

There are deep concerns felt by most KOLs for the small local communities that are reliant on forestry. This goes beyond those who are directly employed, but those who are indirectly reliant on the industry. If the native forestry industry is to close, the impact on local communities will be devastating.

It's purely political, I think that it's an easy win we just stop it. It is easier to say that and convince people than well we're going to transition out of it over the next 35 years, even that I have to say don't think such a great idea. Yet you have to do it short term when its politics because we have short election cycles. I don't know enough about the timber industry in Victoria but I just think here because so many jobs revolve around the timber industry and generally in small communities, so you take them out and that has a massive impact on a community

One of the ways the communities will decline and perhaps become cease to exist is that those who work in the support services, such as the local teachers or carpenters will also have to leave. Trained and skilled people will need to move and look for new work and the unskilled will struggle to reskill.

If you take a mill out of a lot of these communities you take a significant percentage of the tertiary trained population out of those communities because chances are an executive working at the mill whether they're male or female is likely to have a partner who is also trained at a similar level whether they are a school teacher, a local carp, a social worker whatever, you shut down the mill you're going to lose two people not one person. It also provides an avenue in a lot of communities where there are not a lot of jobs for unskilled workers, and I hate using the word unskilled

It is also suggested it will be difficult for what are categorised as 'unskilled' workers to find work that pays them a similar wage. Forestry jobs, such as working in a sawmill, were described as being well paid. Working in forestry requires unique skills that many learn 'on the job'. These skills are not transferable and the income that could be found post the industry discontinuing are not thought to be anywhere close to comparable. KOLs are concerned for these local communities and their people.

All forestry employees whether they are millhand or a person working in the forest have skills, but the collective term is unskilled. There are not a lot of jobs for people like that that are earning reasonably good money. The reality is every worker that's working in a saw mill is earning pretty reasonable money. They are going to earn more doing that than they are working on a farm. That money keeps those communities afloat. You shut down a lot of these mills it's a death knell for the community

Local knowledge will be lost

Forestry Corporation staff are known for their activities when there are fires. They were, according to a few KOLs, active and influenced the management and defence of the town in the 2019/2020 fires. They know the roads, know the landscape and they know how to fight

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fires. If Forestry Corporation were discontinued, with that goes much local knowledge that has proven to be so important in situations such as fires.

It's so prone to bushfires then and I was reminded the other day when we had our bushfires here in 2019/20, I said do you know who was actually leading when I used to go to fire headquarters who was leading the pack; it was actually Forestry NSW why, because they had the best knowledge about the forest and they knew what needed to be done and they were the ones actually directing traffic in terms of where will we have to have breaks and they could access because there's fire trails. You lock up a forest you lose all of that and you get a fire in there you have no way of accessing it. I just think I wish people would kind of think it through it's very easy when it's an emotional issue for people to be, they will grab onto anything that supports their argument unfortunately

17.7 Private native forestry

17.7.1 Summary

The Plantations and Reafforestation Act was introduced in 1999. Once a grower is granted their 'stamp' they are allowed to commercially grow timber. They must adhere to the rules and regulations of this Act.

Private native forestry (PNF) provides approximately forty percent of native forestry in NSW. Conservationists view PNF as the way forward to removing native forestry in State forests. It will require land being acquired and other government support. This concept is deemed to be an inadequate proposal by some KOLs who felt informed enough to speak on this topic. The key objections are the erratic nature of those who own the land; farmers or landowners are not skilled, the incentive is purely money not forest health, and the land required to grow native forests outside of the existing state forests does not exist.

The main objections are:

Forestry Corporation excellence

There is agreement among pro-native forestry KOLs that Forestry Corporation is better at managing forests than those who currently are working their PNFs. Forestry Corporation has the experience, technology, science and is committed to the long haul. Those engaged in PNF are thought to have limited amounts of these assets or skills, which will in the long-term lead to poor quality forests and timber product.

Pausing on that for a moment, what we've got is, I fully support what State Forest does because we're trying to coexist here with the habitat that's here with minimal impact and their approach is far more sustainable than what we're doing with Private Native Forest

Forestry Corporation supply necessary

KOLs cannot understand how the timber supply will fare if Forestry Corporation ceases production in 2028. There is a strong belief that currently there is not enough supply (Australia already imports timber) so if the supply ceases in 2028, PNF will not have anywhere near enough timber and the reliance on imports can only increase.

For argument's sake it might end up the 2028, the end of the wood supply agreements. There is documentation that says, we can take down State Forest activity, the 30,000 hectares that they tree farm with, it will be supplemented by private forest. There is documentation on that yet what we do at the moment is about twice as much State Forest as Private Native Forest and there is not even enough available today to sustain the current level of Private Native Forest to produce the 275,000

Key opinion leaders

Farmer commitment is not guaranteed

Growing a PNF on a farm limits the options a farmer has for growing other products. At some point they could easily decide it is not economically viable and take out the plantation, which leaves the industry short of supply

Now, if we plant that as a Forest State Corporation and we're going to manage it as part of our long term plans I can guarantee you that we will grow it into a certain product and will supply it because our intent is unlikely to change because we have an app that tells us what to do. But a farmer they work on a completely different sort of economic framework and they can change overnight and it has I've seen the plantations in Northern NSW its planted gets to 10 years old and the owner goes ah hell with all that stuff just bulldozer and burn it off I've seen that dozens and dozens of times when travelling into different forests because their intent changes all of a sudden the land value and the value of beef whatever it might be significantly exceeds whatever they are going to get out of the trees and so the intent changes

Reliance on 'intergenerational investment'

A native forest can take upwards of 60 years to establish itself which means a farmer who plants a forest today will never reap the benefits himself. Growing the timber will limit their income but secure income for the owners of the property, which might not even be their family, in the future. Long term planning of this type is unusual.

Depending on the species some of the science says somewhere between 60 and 80 years to get a structural piece of timber out. Australians are not good at intergenerational investment. You and I if we were growing something like that chances are we are not even growing for our children, we are growing for our children's children. What is it, the average Australian holds their house for 3 ½ years before they move onto their next property, it's some ridiculous statistic like that

Farmers lack skills

Farmers are not skilled foresters. One KOL who regularly looks at PNFs commented that farmers, despite being instructed on how to manage a forest, rarely follow suggestions. Many PNFs in their opinion are in a poor state of health.

landowners, they don't know any better, they don't realise that they're ruining the environment, they don't understand it, they don't understand silviculture. It's not like they're deliberately ruining the forest, but they are. Some might know because they've been told by the person that turns up and does the inspection, they are told the facts that it's in poor condition or healthy or whatever or you can do this or do that, but they go and do it anyway

Farmers cannot be easily observed

Forestry Corporation and the way they manage their forests are under constant scrutiny by those who work outside of the native forestry industry. A concern was raised that farmers are

Key opinion leaders

much harder to monitor and control what they do on their property. Aside from ‘interested’ neighbours, it will be difficult for properties to be monitored for their forests, which has the potential to lead to poor practices and therefore an unreliable timber supply.

You are quite right; the probability of sustainable ecologically valid management is going to be far higher on State Forest where they are under the eyes of the regulators to a larger degree than a farmer in the middle of nowhere who has got no neighbours that can see what’s happening and it’s all happening within their property. I’m not suggesting that they would intentionally go out and do things wrong but if they go and do it themselves it’s probably not going to be ideal

Business owned PNFs

Businesses who own PNFs are a potential issue for the industry, as they bring with them a different set of issues. A farmer or forester is interested in the land and what it can produce. A business that has invested in a PNF is usually profit motivated, which means financially focussed decisions could be made which disregard the health of the forest. Additionally, businesses go into liquidation or face financial issues and the PNF may well be a casualty in the washup of resolving their financial issues.

The stuff that scares me the most are the forests that are managed by accountants. They are chasing a bottom line and as you quite rightly say at any time they can go in and liquidate the whole lot because of a debt they’ve got somewhere. I have yet to meet a forester who doesn’t love trees and who isn’t really passionate about what they do. They are definitely not destruction merchants. I’ve never met too many farmers that aren’t passionate about what they do either

Like I said I don’t know the actual facts behind it but there were thousands of acres put under some sort of eucalypt or something like that. The company went bankrupt, and they were all sold off and it just didn’t work. Again, I don’t know why but all I know is that I saw it all occur at the time, there was substantive holdings, thousands of acres put under these plantations

Many PNFs are in poor health

One KOL assesses PNFs regularly. They believe they are seeing a decline in the quality of the PNFs they are assessing. In the past they are thought to have been healthier but this KOL has seen a rapid deterioration in the quality. Two-thirds of the timber they are taking is considered ‘low grade’ whereas in the past only one-third would have been classified this way. They are concerned the timber needs of Australia cannot be based on the quality of the PNFs.

We look at hundreds of forests every year and we’ve been doing it for many years, thousands and thousands of examples and in that though, and a good example of that is only five years ago one in four of the privately owned forest that we would inspect was suitable, one in four, the others were maybe done too recently or too unhealthy, different reasons. Now it is more like one in fifteen, only five years later

Key opinion leaders

Another good example would be, we've covered enough to know, our sample base is far more than anybody else's and our records show it. I was a log cutter in the 90s for my father's business and two-thirds of what I took from the forest was high grade and one-third that were low grade, now today the average is two-thirds low grade and one-third high grade. That is also representative of the quality of today's forest

Lack of available land

KOLs feel a major issue in the concept of greater reliance on PNF is the lack of available land. If PNF is to occur on farmers' land, they will need to be subsidized to the point where it is more profitable for them to grow trees than to use their land in some other way, such as cattle production.

The other argument these KOLs hear is that crown land can be used. Those with this point of view do not know where the excess crown land might be; the reality is that State forests are in fact crown land already. They do not see what the difference in practical terms is.

When they talk about grow some hardwood somewhere else, firstly you've got to finance it with the farmer, it has got to be financed, they've also got to go well you've got to pay me more than what my cattle is worth if that's where the cattle is. Let's do it on some crown land, well isn't that what we're already doing right now

Council interference

KOLs understand the role councils need to play, but some councils were reported to be less positive about native forestry than others. There is genuine concern that a forest could be grown, but when it comes to harvesting, despite having the trees grown according to the legislation, councils may have the right not to approve the harvest. Allegedly a council could rezone and claim the area to be in a national park.

One KOL discussed the issue of consent. The different LGAs have different rules; forestry is either permitted without consent, permitted with consent, or prohibited. There are differing rules in different councils. Tweed LGA prohibits forestry. The Great Lakes LGA permits forestry but with a tight code of consent. Each LGA will determine how it wants to approach forestry. Each LGA will also have a Local Environment Plan (LEP). According to one participant, forestry without consent, which comes under the LEP, is in place for rural zones. This means so long as the grower gets approval from the local Land Services, council cannot stop them.

What concerns this KOL is there are two councils that are trying to stop this process where the local Land Services have the ultimate power; some are 'fence sitting' because it is in their LEP and the rest do not require consent.

Another participant said council interference is another distraction for farmers and a big disincentive not to become involved in PNF. This KOL is concerned farming is becoming too rule-bound and is seeing many farmers leave their properties. They are concerned if growing

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a PNF becomes uncertain and too rule-bound, it will not provide an adequate supply of timber.

Now when we look at Private Native Forestry we've got some privately owned properties that you can't manage because of particular zoning, environmental zones etcetera, the council decided that you can't touch your forest because it's in a National Park

If you look at all the LGAs and all the councils, what you've got there is two key points. One is in all the local environmental plans you've got your zonings of course and some privately owned land is zoned like C2 it is called today but environmental protection and it might be because that private native forest was determined because it joins a National Park. We want to protect that forest joining National Parks. I understand the principle behind it, probably a little unfair to take away, I've got friends here at Coffs Harbour that have been zoned environmental protection and they adjoin some State Forest. State Forest clear fell beside them, but they can't touch their own forest because some silly reason they were zoned, back then it was called B2 but now C2

In every local environmental plan for every LGA, Tweed, Port Macquarie, all the different LGAs, forestry is either permitted without consent from council, permitted with consent or prohibited. It's prohibited in Tweed, so Tweed is out no forestry, that's fine, they've been like that forever, they are a sensitive council, everybody is anti-forestry, I respect that, that's fine. You go all the way down to Great Lakes, they for example might be permitted with consent and they are really strict on that. You can go and get a logging approval through Local Land Services called the PNF Plan, but you're supposed to go and do a DA with Great Lakes to get their approval as well. You would be lucky if you could prove existing use rights, you may have heard that term thrown around. There is another avenue for landholders is that if they actually had approval and managed their forest every year prior to the LEP coming in 2014, then they can prove that they've got existing use rights before that was in place

My point is that every council that surrounds Port Macquarie their LEP, so Kempsey, Walcha, Gloucester and Taree, all surround Port Macquarie. Port Macquarie says permitted with consent in the LEP, the rest say permitted without consent. What that really means when it says permitted without consent which most LEPs are, the majority is permitted without consent for rural zones. It means you go and get your approval from local Land Services and council can't stop you. It is really important to acknowledge that

A KOL who works for a council had a slightly different opinion. They felt it is the Land Services that timber growers should be more concerned about than the local councils.

The second part to it was, there were some of them were concerned about changes in environmental regulation and the Native Title and Native Vegetation Act and whether they would be able to clear them or not. The Native Veg Act, council plays a role in but in rural areas like that it's Land Services who administer it. As a property owner I would be very concerned investing in a 30-year investment where it is subject to such change and often stringent regulation

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There is additional concern that the council positions are being targeted by people from the 'Greens'. They believe their objective is to control council with the view to 'shutting down the industry'.

PNF hasn't been a huge issue but it's growing, and the green groups are on to council and councils have levers where they can be involved or not involved, and some are and some aren't. It's a growing issue which is impacting on the management of Private Native Forest

Arguably that forest is the product of forestry, but we've now got people who want to tell us what we can or can't do there. Even on private land the native forest space is becoming more contentious.

Outside interference

In addition to council and potential movable council rules, there is also concern that others will start to become more interested in PNFs and lobby to place additional rules and regulations on them. There are some groups currently agitating for a PNF to do a full wildlife survey before they harvest it. There are regulations around native wildlife currently in place, but the livelihood and commitment to a PNF potentially could dwindle if the rules and regulations are too onerous.

Whereas that is Fred's forest or Harry's forest. There has been quite a shift in that of late too, this is a forest and therefore we all have a say in this regardless of the fact that it must belong to someone else who has managed it for a long time

Flip that to the government and that's usually what's happening on public land is what is going to happen to you on private land within 10 years, so there's now a group objecting, have been groups objecting to plantation harvesting on state forests in the last few years and they have just signalled that there is a possibility that there could be, they haven't found any, but they're just saying because there are rare animals in the surround state forests and national parks possibly in that plantation so perhaps you should have to do a full wildlife survey before you harvest it

The issue of wildlife and what are considered onerous conditions that are placed on property holders is another source of concern for the success of PNF. There is concern a forest will be ready to harvest but an animal, such as a koala will be nearby and the property owner will be prevented from realising the investment they have made.

That's not right, you're asking someone to essentially give up land which can be very, very valuable, not for a koala habitat at the moment but potentially if you let it grow out in 30 years' time it would be a koala habitat. That's just socialism taking people's land for no actual reason. That's what we fought on and yet if you were to go back and Google the media reports of that time none of that comes through the surface, because it became a political story, except very early on when people were actually only talking about the issue and not the politics

Fear of losing control on their property

Growing timber is a contentious issue that is escalating. Many KOLs feel the farmers will reject the opportunities that come with growing timber because of the unrelenting interference that comes with this product. It is easier to diversify into other areas even if they are not potentially as profitable.

That's why landholders don't want a bar of any of this stuff because of the potential loss of management, their sovereignty, their ownership, loss of control because there are native trees on there. It feeds in reverse; you do get a particularly older farmers go I don't want a bar of that

17.8 Misinformation

17.8.1 Summary

Those within the forestry industry describe the frustration they feel towards their perception of misinformation that is put out by those who do not support native forestry. As previously discussed, there are few if any avenues where those who support native forestry can express their views and feel they are being given a fair platform.

This section of the report is relaying the frustrations native forestry supporters feel about information and approaches those who oppose the industry use to discredit the industry. The main frustrations are:

- Deliberate misuse of images that depict the industry acting in ways that are not true
- Motivations of conservationist movement groups
- Lack of engagement with conservationist movement groups

17.8.2 Background

There is an appreciation for how the hostility for native forestry began, what those interviewed do not understand is why those opposed are still portraying the industry as it was in the past, not how it is operating now. There is a feeling that those opposed are not updating their attitudes as this will go against the environmental position that they are trying to be put forward.

I'm not saying we're perfect and certainly there is a track record for decades would have made the foundation for all sorts of people hating us and disliking us, rainforest logging and big environmental disasters from the late 80s and early 90s and things, but I mean I was in primary school at that stage, it's not really relevant to my career. And when I look all the things we have and the level of understanding we have of the forest and how we do what we do I'm totally comfortable in that space. But I have also had that perspective for 20 years I have seen the same area harvested two or three times and you can go out there and basically not really tell the difference between that forest and the one on the other side of the road which is a conservation estate

Clear felling

Much of the material promoted by the conservationist movement will often have a photo of a clear fell but under the narrative of native forestry. This is deliberately misleading. Clear felling occurs in a plantation forest but not where there is native forestry. Most KOLs interviewed believe this is a deliberate strategy to confuse people. Currently the conservationists are supporting plantation forestry and know this is part of the practice so the conclusion those in the forestry industry are forced to come to is that this is a deliberate strategy to scare and intimidate people into believing this is the practice in native forestry.

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Despite the fact that our detractors are out there selling a message that we need to transition to plantations most of the images that they use, a lot of the upset comes from plantation clear fell and then they'll use photos of plantation clear fell bizarrely saying we need to end the destruction, get out of native forests and get into plantations and actually showing an image of a plantation clear fell

Part of that is lack of knowledge and part of it is disingenuous. Give us an impactful photo and that's what it looks like. We deal with a lot of disinformation and misinformation, I think

Land clearing inaccuracies

KOLs feel there is a feeling in the community that NSW has a land clearing problem, with too much land being cleared by both the native forestry industry and farmers. This opinion frustrates many within the native forestry industry because they believe it is factually untrue. They do not believe forestry should be included in the conversation around land clearing and they also feel that farmers' clearing is mostly legitimate.

There are very inaccurate descriptions of what is land clearing and Forestry gets tangled up in the idea of land clearing and the numbers around land clearing but it shouldn't be but it is counted in those numbers. And secondly a lot of clearing that farmers do are in basic native species so the things that shouldn't be there to start with but the satellites pick it up as a big patch that has been cleared when in fact they're actually doing what they should be doing controlling the invasive ... there is a lot of misinformation in that space as well. I think Forestry has really got to tell us to separate itself from the whole land clearing discussion

Images

The use of imagery is used effectively by conservationist groups because they portray the industry as being brutal, shambolic and destructive. Those in the industry naturally find these images to be a complete misrepresentation of their truth. The images are not just those used in clear felling, other uses are koalas, hazard reduction burning, and pine forest activity portrayed as native forestry. The image of a photoshopped koala on recently felled trees is emotionally driven and has great success as it encourages people to donate to the group to help save the koalas, although how the money is spent is not discussed. Many within the forestry industry believe it is used to mount political campaigns and disseminate inaccurate information to the public.

I find some even really experienced Greens, ones who should know better, also conflate clear felling of plantation with native forest. I think that's the biggest myth out there at the moment

As I said I've been to markets and they will have these big photos blown up and not a single tree standing and if you said where is that picture taken, it's local and I go well but my point is exactly where, I want to know where can I drive and see that actual forest and of course they can't give you an answer because it's actually probably anywhere in NSW let alone Australia. It is disingenuous and it makes it difficult for

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the Forestry Industry for a start or even government to provide evidence-based sensible factual information to the community. When they see enough of the rubbish it's harder to bring them back the other way

They are exceptionally good marketers. They tie in any trees with 'just killed a koala'. They won't even engage in selective harvesting because they won't buy that because that has killed one koala and that is not okay. Every tree kills a koala or stops their food source. They are very emotive with their language and very powerful with their language and then bring a whole lot of other people with them

Funding

Those interviewed who work or have a connection with the native forestry industry believe some environmental groups will deliberately publicise information that they must know cannot be true. These groups rely on donations and the easiest way to raise money is to claim a species, such as the koalas, are heading towards extinction. The forestry industry does not support that situation based on the evidence available and believes the conservationist groups must also have access to the same information but are deliberately ignoring it. Section 4.7 specifically addresses all aspects of the koala debate.

I think there is a degree of their financial interest in continuing to oppose forestry and they make a lot of money out of campaigns re in koalas and things even the people at the top of WWF for example know very well the science doesn't support their arguments, but there is no way they can cut off that sort of funding stream. I think they are careful in the way they pitch their campaigns to make it look like forestry is the culprit when they know other things that are much more under threat than to koalas and those animals

So the top tier NGOs will understand that broader perspective but at the same time they can't come out and say they're going to support forestry either. They'll say they support the plantation forestry

The funding conservationist groups receive through their campaigns is used to fund what are described as 'well-orchestrated campaigns' that can be political and/or physical. They are designed to interrupt supply and also for political gain.

Absolutely yes. And the campaigns against forestry are so well resourced and organised now. The Bob Brown Foundations and others are channelling huge resources and funding into really well-orchestrated campaigns both attacking on a legal perspective as well as protests to disrupt supply and all the political it is just relentless

Conservationists - who they might be

KOLs were asked for their opinion on who they feel becomes a conservationist and why. The consistent feedback is those who join have a strong ideology which they live by and are not prepared to update or compromise. The forests are to be untouched because this environment is almost a religious experience for them. Some are thought to be able to bend

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their sense of what the truth is in order to place pressure on the outcome they want, which is to stop native forestry.

If you walk into a forest and you deem it to be a cathedral, a perfect place of holy creation and then someone is going to come in and make a mess of that, anything I can do to stop that is justifiable. It justifies a whole heap of things that most people wouldn't get involved in like deliberate misrepresentation, it justifies the mean kind of thing

Conservationists, through the eyes of those who are pro native forestry, are not thought to represent the population but are a smaller very well organised groups who know how to work the political environment. Some would be surprised if the number of those who are deeply unhappy with native forestry are more than five percent of the population.

I think with most issues, given the business I'm in, I'd say there is 10% of the population who are really anti everything. I'm exaggerating it, but they really believe that human beings are bad. Our footprint is a bad thing and almost not exaggerating but they would prefer where there is less people, less impact on the environment because the environment is sacrosanct. That's their standing point and you can't convince them of anything. One tree cut down literally isn't good enough

Conservationists are seen as being deeply invested in their cause which means they are motivated to be heard and seen. Being visible is part of the attraction.

We've been a bit slow to get it off the ground, in the very beginning of our hardwood, we need to know where we are. We have what I think is a relatively small group of people, extremely motivated, loud, really good at amplifying their voice and we're very good at just going on with our job and hoping it will go away, which hasn't worked in the last 40 years

Conservationist groups are very good at motivating people who hold similar belief systems to be proactive. Those who are heavily invested in anti-native forestry will easily accept motivating information and are prepared to act on that.

Some of it is political and power but I think a lot of it is a genuinely held belief that man is generally a negative influence in the world and this is one cutting edge of it and we need to leave wilderness be wilderness. It is a belief system for a lot of them. They will stir the troops and fire them up and point them in the right direction and fill them with a lot of moral indignity and then we get protestors and people climbing up trees

Some KOLs feel those in the conservationist movement have a world view that government cannot be trusted. They are also likely to believe that the environment is in a drastic state and cannot be repaired and it is mostly the fault of government.

I could hypothesise about it and I think a fair bit of it has got to do with a world view which is less about the specific issue but more about the issue that Governments can't be trusted and the world is in ecological peril all that kind of thing which I think there is a world view like that and they're the people that tend to be of that persuasion

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The philosophy of conservationists is confusing for some KOLs. They feel the position these people take is not in keeping with the needs of society. A small gain, native forestry being discontinued, is not going to help the broader society.

To take a perspective that says that all forestry be for nature and nothing else that to me is like well okay that's sort of delegitimising our entire society in saying the forest needs to be over there and society needs to be over here and we're just going to leave it

The last observation made by one KOL is the hypocrisy of some who are anti native forestry. Several KOLs scoffed at the urban anti-native forestry person who can in the same sentence say how bad native forestry is and then invite them to look at their new floorboards. Equally irritating is those who feel a tree is sacrosanct but drive older non-environmentally friendly cars and live in timber houses. These people have a tree ideology that does not seem to extend much past wanting to be involved in the debate but not living their truth.

It's partially the Nimbi stuff, there is some of that goes into it, then it's the ideology stuff that says every tree that we're taking down is damaging the environment or threatening the koala or negative to our environment. Those same people that drive vans with black smoke out the back and live in timber houses

It is the collective experience of positive native forestry KOLs that many conservationists are not just focussed on native forestry, but they are also putting forward demands about a range of issues. The suggestion is they are always on the lookout for a cause to complain about.

The same people who complain about housing was complaining about this. You are also complaining about high rise, you are also complaining about new housing, and you are also complaining about not enough housing. You're also the ones who want the greatest number of immigration refugees, you are the same person, how do you hold all these thoughts in your head

Petitions

It is thought petitions are easy to sign, and people do, but they are not across what the petition is genuinely about. One KOL observed witnessing people signing petitions about what is allegedly going on in the forest, but when they are in the forest, it is unusual to see anyone out and enjoying what it has to offer. Their point is, people will sign a petition but actually have little or no interest in the forest and how it is managed.

And it took us all day by the time we driven out to the other end of that forest and we didn't see a single person out there and there is nothing stopping people being out there and it was the perfect day and it's just like okay, down in the town there is the Bellingen markets and 10,000 people are there buying their hemp sleeping bags and you know all that stuff. And signing petitions to say to stop forestry and its sort of like I absolutely embrace and love going out to our forests for all sorts of reasons all the time, but I don't see that sort of people doing it, I'm pretty sceptical about that suddenly changing because you changed the road signs to a different colour saying now this is conservation reserve

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Refusal to engage

The industry believes it has tried to reach out to conservationist groups to see what common ground can be found and to discuss some of the issues they raise. One KOL described how they invited conservationist groups to some workshops to encourage engagement. Only one group turned up which was disappointing. It was also, in their eyes a poor reflection of the intent of these groups.

We ran some workshops where we invited environment groups and they all declined to actually turn up. They initially agreed to turn up so it was only to have a conversation about how would you like us to engage with you but behind the scenes particular individuals got involved and made all the environment groups withdraw apart from one. Which was crazy but it's just the way they don't ever want to be seen to be engaging because its engaging with the enemy kind of thing

17.9 Koalas

17.9.1 Summary

There are two quite different opinions about the health status of koalas in North East NSW. Those supportive of native forestry believe the koalas are not facing extinction and in certain parts of North East NSW there are healthy numbers. This group also believes there are bigger threats to koalas than native timber forestry. The conservationist groups disagree with this position with many believing koalas are nearing extinction, with the native forestry industry being the chief cause of this situation. Conservationist groups regularly use the plight of the koalas as a means to raise funds for their cause.

The topic of koalas and their alleged demise is a topic that many KOLs who support native forestry spoke about. The opinion of these KOLs are as follows:

Genuine threats to koalas

Forestry supporters hold a strong belief that the industry is not a threat to their existence and there are far bigger genuine threats that are influencing their habitats. The main ones are:

- Urbanisation
- Roadkill
- Animals
- Unkept National Parks
- Fires
- Chlamydia

They are beautiful but they push people's buttons beautifully. The reality is if you want to stop koala deaths treat chlamydia, take cars off the road and get rid of all the dogs. Any one of those three factors would have a far greater impact than the forestry sector is having

I see practical examples when you lock land up, it is actually really bad for koalas. You get lantana, you get weeds, you get feral animals, they can't move around. They literally move out of national parks into privately owned lands because they can't move around in national parks, especially where weeds get out of control there and the feral animals aren't maintained

But the koala hospital here will tell you that the biggest threat to koalas is actually not harvesting or timber at this point in time it's dog kill and road strikes because we're becoming more urbanised. We are encroaching on some koala habitat and they and cars don't kind of mix well together. No different than any other species and I walk every morning I walked down the road today there's a dead bandicoot and we live in a very watered area and so some people think well that's great because you have lots of timber around your house; but that means that there is more intersections with

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flora and fauna that the repercussion of that is that you get road strikes or you get dog attacks

Koala management plans

Koalas are protected by management plans that foresters have to abide by. In addition, KOLs believe foresters do not like killing animals and therefore respect the rules and regulations. Foresters discussed the measures they put in place to make sure koalas are not injured or killed in the process of harvesting.

The reality is there are koala management plans that foresters have to abide by, and they don't tend to go and do horizon to horizon removal of trees. They'll do a compartment, a block, a lot, whatever terminology the forester will be using, and they will be surrounded by other areas that are intact

Koalas inspire emotional responses

Koalas are regularly used in conservation campaigns because they are a much-loved animal that has an emotional connection with most people. The concept that koalas could become extinct is upsetting for many. Those who support forestry understand this connection and are aware of the power it has, but they are unable to counter-balance the connection. The find they are in the unenviable situation where if they disagree with information put out about koalas, they are seen as anti-koala which is not in fact their position.

I think the koala in particular is a very politically fraught topic and it's one of those things all somebody has to do is put a koala in front of something and if you're on the opposite side of that people will say that you're anti-koala, that's how quite ridiculous our conversation on this topic has gotten

I think there is a real reluctance of people to speak up and that reluctance has allowed the other side to fill that vacuum with whatever they want

Supporters of native forestry recognise that harvesting is not perfect and occasionally a tree is harvested with a koala in it. They view this as a tragic circumstance and are trying to ensure this rarely if ever happens. While there is acknowledgement this is not acceptable, what surprises them is people would prefer the industry to be closed down because of it without any consideration of the human hardship this will cause.

Killing a koala, gets a lot more leverage than keeping 5 families in Grafton employed

Koalas are not facing extinction

The conservation movement believe koalas along with many other species are in danger of extinction. This is not a belief those who support forestry support. The collective belief agrees koalas are under threat in some areas, specifically near the coastal regions where there is a high population density, but not in State forests.

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Many KOLs referred to the work being conducted by Dr Brad Law who is regarded as a koala expert. These KOLs discussed how difficult it was to track koalas but Dr Law is now using techniques that are considered far more accurate than previous methods. Koalas are considered to be shy and difficult to detect which has meant in the past it was difficult to judge how many koalas were present.

It is now possible to have a much better understanding of how many koalas are in an area and whether they are mobile or stay in the same area. It is now believed there are far more koalas than initially thought.

Yeah some of the science Brad Law at the moment is showing there is probably more males just up in the North East than we thought the whole NSW population out of total, there is significantly more out there than what they thought, it's just the old survey techniques were really ineffective. And that is even after the bushfires we've done work in the same forest pre and post fires and found very little change to koala populations

Those supporting native forestry would like the discussion about koalas to be science based, not emotionally driven. They would like the data that has been collected to be better known so it can provide more confidence in the public and political circles that koalas are not as under threat as the conservationist groups are portraying.

Again, I was talking to Forestry NSW, they are actually the only ones that have collected consistently over the past decade koala numbers and can demonstrate actually that since the bushfires we are seeing a significant increase in the numbers. Everyone else can say oh yeah but you know we have lost thousands of koalas how do you know that, do we have a thousand koalas tagged and suddenly we don't where they are. Anyone would tell you I'm the biggest advocate for the protection of koalas and their habitat and so on. But I think you have to be sensible and it has to be evidence based which clearly some of those conversations aren't evidence based

Parliamentary enquiry

KOLs who discussed the parliamentary enquiry into koalas were not impressed by the process. At the parliamentary enquiry a statement was made that koalas will be extinct by 2050. This figure has stuck but it is frustrating because as one KOL discussed, at a parliamentary enquiry, many statements are made but so long as they are made in a certain way, they are acceptable to make. Vague comments using words such as 'may' or 'could' do not have the backing of evidence but leave a lasting impression.

That's the frustrating thing, this whole thing keeps coming back, oh there was a parliamentary enquiry that said they'll be extinct by 2050, well that was a very definite statement, people who understand parliamentary enquiries understand that they can say whatever you want them to say and there is no science or fact or anything behind that. If you read the enquiry carefully it doesn't say that at all, it uses language like could be or maybe

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Those who support native forestry do not believe there is any evidence koalas will be extinct by 2050.

I've seen it everywhere like somebody raised it at a parliamentary enquiry but I also presented evidence as like there is literally no reason to believe that koalas will be extinct by 2050 unless you believe almost every other species who also will be extinct by 2050. Anyway, but that message just doesn't seem to be getting through

Koalas are considered to be hardy, robust and spread throughout the east coast of Australia.

I'm quite well informed about it and I can understand that it seems like an outrageous comment but I don't know how anybody can genuinely believe it if they think it true, koalas live all the way from Northern Queensland right down to Victoria and South Australia and they are in everything from our sub tropics to the alpine environments to the arid zone almost out in the Pilliga, they're pretty robust widely distributed species if they were to go extinct it would be some kind of event

There is further belief that if a species is under threat, it is not because of forestry.

Take Leadbetter's Possum in Victoria, they thought it was extinct and now everywhere they look they are finding new colonies. That's a good thing but it shows that a whole lot of areas that were managed for forestry obviously weren't detrimental to their existence

Corridors

The concept of koala corridors is cause for concern for some KOLs. The concept as they described it is if the owner of private land has a koala habitat that means they are not allowed to do anything with it. This is accepted and understood. What concerns these KOLs is the discussion around extending this regulation so that if a farmer has a koala habitat on a couple of parts of their land, then they would have to provide a safe corridor for the koalas to move. This discussion is for these KOLs is not based on any science or specific knowledge about koalas and how they move. The implications of this concept is enormous for the owner of the private property.

I've had meetings with many people over ten years, I don't know if you've seen the map, there is a map that these people have of the corridors that they want to create. This goes back to my original point about the complete zealots on this, they want to replace farmland with back to nature. Their argument is to say that the koala has a corridor to move around without being harmed. That's where that comes from, I think it's completely dangerous, I think it lowers our food supply

We come back to the original koala issue, already if you have a koala habitat on your property you can't do anything with it on private land. That's been the law now for a long, long time. We weren't even discussing that or fighting that. What they wanted to do further was to say, well if you've got forest on your eastern boundary and on our western boundary we need to also take over your property so that the koalas can walk from one side to the other

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National parks v State forests

Many KOLs believe based on recent research with koalas there is no difference in the number of koala habitats in a native forest to a State Forest. It is their belief that koalas can live peacefully in the State forests and there is even evidence to show that the koalas prefer the State forests as they are better maintained. Many KOLs are of the opinion that 'locking up the forests' is not a good option for the koalas.

One KOL discussed how Dr Brad Law's research demonstrated that there were koalas 'thriving in North Coast State forests which have a long history of timber harvesting'.

There are many who are of the opinion that koalas are at less risk in a State Forest as unlike the native forest, they are managed by 'cold fire regime' that reduces the incidence of fires.

A belief is held that koalas prefer younger growing trees, which are more likely to be found in a State Forest where harvesting occurs.

Koalas are reported to thrive in climates where they have the right soil, topography, rainfall and species of eucalyptus. These conditions tend to be more inland than on the coast. One KOL described working with Dr Brad Law on a property to understand more about koalas. In the past determining whether a koala was in a tree was as rudimentary as finding koala scat (faeces) was at the bottom of a tree which was not always a successful practice.

State forest quite a few years ago, they saw this koala thing coming as a problem and they were also having to survey for them, koalas are bloody hard to find. In a forest 500 trees per hectare or something and they've all got scambly branches, there might be in a hectare of forest, maybe there is one or two koalas, it's like trying to find a needle in a haystack. What the code demanded is that they walk around under each tree and scratch around in the ground and try and find some scats at the bottom. If they can't find that then they go, well we couldn't find any, no koalas here, we'll log it in a certain way. If they do find the scats then we'd apply koala prescriptions

The approach Dr Brad Law took was:

- Audio devices were put in place to record koala calls
- These were collected after 7 days
- The data was sent to the University of Queensland for analysis

They developed, pretty world first, audio moths, little digital recorders, put them in the bush, get a digital recording of what goes on there, otherwise they don't call until the night time

They developed these things, pretty cheap digital recorder, cable tie it on the tree and you come back in 7 days and you take it down and they send it off to the University of Queensland, they run it through a big data, there is a lot of data there, the call of the koala is so unique, they can find that with an algorithm and they'll run that through

Key opinion leaders

the computer, it's data rich, a big processor, they go there are three koala calls on that recorder

- The calls that are made are male calls so the assumption made is one call equals two koalas as koalas are described by this KOL as a '50/50 species'
- It was found, based on this data being recorded in similar habitat areas, that there is no difference in the number of koalas in National Parks as there is in State forests

You get calls on recorder you know you've got two koalas. They've done that across the range of state forests over a number of years, they've done a bit of it in national parks, it basically shows there is no difference in occupation when you take into account those other factors, productivity, species, all of those things. If you've got a like for like site and it's in a national park or if it's in a state forest it makes no difference.

Forestry Corporation

Forestry Corporation KOLs feel they have a deep understanding about koalas and they have a habitat model across the whole forest. They also have monitoring programs and use GPS tracking. They are regularly reassessing and monitoring their models to ensure koalas can live safely in the State forests particularly where there is native forestry harvesting.

And no one knows more about koalas than we do. We have a really deep understanding of koalas in terms of where they live in our forest we have the habitat model across our whole forest. We have monitoring programs where we use cutting edge science, we use GPS tracking

But we also need to understand across the areas we do harvest timber what can we be doing, what should we be doing to ensure that we have koalas continuing to use those areas and we have all those things and we're constantly working on monitoring on that so we know that it is actually working

17.9.2 Great Koala National Park

Summary

The proposal for the Koala National Park in Coffs Harbour is a contentious concept. There is a lack of certainty around the proposed plan. Many KOLs discussed the concept: it is in its infancy planning state but no KOL is confident 'the right' outcome will be achieved. Those supporting native forestry are opposed to the Koala National Park because they do not believe it is necessary as the concept of koalas being under threat is not a proven concept. They view this park as an attempt to force the native forestry industry into closure as the proposed park is 'conveniently' in the heartland of native forestry. They also reject the concept native forestry can be replaced by tourism opportunities. The conservationist groups believe the park is necessary for the survival of koalas, are positive about tourism opportunities and are disappointed by the lack of decisive action being taken to create it.

Key opinion leaders

This quote summarises the attitudes of those who are questioning the merits of a koala park

I think the people who are for it, what they put out there is that this is a solution that gets rid of a costly industry, which is rubbish, and improves outcomes for koalas, which is rubbish and it will increase tourism and replace all the jobs, which is rubbish

Arguments against

This section are the views held by those who are supportive of native forestry. All these KOLs recognise and support the policies that are in place to protect koala habitats.

Politics

The Great Koala National Park (the park) is believed by those for native forestry to be the result of political manipulation as opposed to logical sense. They believe the current NSW government has consistently had the creation of this park on their agenda before they came into power and now, there is the belief they will need to be seen to be acting on their promises. There is currently no clear outline being provided about what direction it will take but many feel there is pressure being applied by the Greens which this NSW government cannot ignore due to political allegiances.

In reality most, if not all parties, certainly in Australia, coming into an election make these major headline commitments and the Great Koala National Park was one of those, it was the third election that they took it to. They will be wanting to tick that off. In what form, is it the original form, they didn't commit, they just said we're going to put \$80 million towards the process towards a Great Koala National Park. What does that mean, I think that's up for grabs. It could be smaller; it could be a combination of production forest and reserved areas and arguably it is already

In the last NSW state election, the park was a key policy of the current NSW government. A few KOLs pointed out that this government did not win any seats in the electorates that will be affected by native forestry closure. This not only suggests the local population is against this policy that will impact their area but, in the eyes of those opposing the park, is further evidence of politics and not governing for those who will be directly affected.

I think what was interesting was that was the one platform they put up in the Coffs and all these districts here was the Great Koala National Park and they didn't get any new votes out of it. It makes me wonder why but it's really about something that wins votes in other electorates

Not an evidenced-based decision

As discussed, many feel there is no evidence to show that koalas thrive better in National Parks than State forests. Given the magnitude of this decision and the impact it will have on native forestry, many KOLs are looking to the government to provide evidence to show this approach is to the optimum benefit of koalas.

Key opinion leaders

I don't support it because at the end of the day if koalas are already there then obviously something is going right in that area, they are able to survive in those areas and there is zero evidence that I've seen that says that they do any better in national parks than they do in forestry even where the timber is taken

From what my research says that they actually tend to prefer the newer, younger shoots, of plantation than the older growth forest. I think there needs to be a lot more explanation about the science of that out there

A KOL discussed, and this attitude was supported by other KOLs, that the areas where koalas are doing better are in fact areas where harvesting has previously occurred many times over the past one-hundred years. They cannot understand why this evidence is being not just rejected, but not even part of the political conversation.

The science is really clear that timber harvesting doesn't affect koalas so that's probably the most interesting fact is around the area where the most timber comes out of is coincidentally the stronghold for koalas, it has been coming out of for the last 100 years so we've harvested more timber in that area where koalas are strongest than anywhere, so it just doesn't make sense

Location and purpose

The location of the park is contentious for many KOLs who took part in this research. The argument given is in this area, there is already considerable allocation to the National Park. Adding the State Forest to the already large national park area does not make sense to them particularly when much of the area being discussed is already forestry reserve land.

I believe in state government investment in order to create this tourist opportunity. I've said to them before, even to some of the Greens politicians, why don't you do that in the park space that you have now, which is about 60% of the total space they want to get to, is already National Park and of what is remaining a lot of that is already nature reserve in the Forestry Reserve

Potentially massive, it depends where the Great Koala National Park is I guess is the thing, so there is a proposal the environment groups put out there that I think is the one that the Government is still calling the proposal and that would take out some of in the order of 40% of our supply area, so it's not small it's humongous. The size of the park isn't that great but its impact on our timber business would be huge. In fact I look at the scale of it and I said it's 40% to 50% of our supply comes from that area and you think well that potentially is catastrophic not just because it doesn't necessarily just downsize by 40% to 50%: you take that much out and maybe the critical ones gone and everything goes completely because of it

All these KOLs believe there is currently enough land dedicated in this area to National Parks and they see no reason for why this should be expanded. One participant suggested the area already available should be simply renamed.

Key opinion leaders

I'm for it because I think it's a positive move that we specifically say that we've got this great Koala National Park that we actually put funding into and support, it will be a well-recognised thing. It is fantastic for tourists and all that. On the other flip side, we've already got 7 million hectares of Great Koala National Park we just haven't called it that, we just call it National Park, we haven't called it the Great Koala National Park. We've got a really, really big great Koala National Park and we would only be adding to it and it will be designated but we do have 7 million hectares of Great Koala National Park now

Strategy - to close native forestry

Those close to native forestry discussed how the proposed park will take forty to fifty percent of the available timber volume which, in their opinion, is more about forcing the industry to close than protecting koalas.

The boundary for the proposed park or what the National Parks Association want about 40 to 45% of the whole North Coast timber volume comes out of that boundary. It is really designed to kill the industry not to protect koalas because it will take out so much volume that it starts to question the viability of the industry. The design of that hasn't been on the basis of what's going to save koalas and unfortunately that's going to be a difficult one to deliver and deal with

Tourism - not a valid replacement opportunity

KOLs addressed the discussion around the possibility of the park being a major tourist destination and its potential to replace the jobs of those working in native forestry. This concept is met with derision from those who are aligned with native forestry. For these KOLs this suggestion is not based on any evidence, and they are unsure of how a park could be set up that would consistently attract enough people to make it viable. The koala parks that are already in operation are not thought to be major tourist destinations and to date, there has been no explanation how a proposed koala park could function.

The reason I say that is tourists, if they want to see a koala, they will go to the Koala Hospital in Port Macquarie or they will go to Taronga Zoo, I think the first white man saw one in 1815 or something. It took them two decades before they saw their first one because that was when they were named. It's not like pre-European settlement, they were just falling out of the trees. Even if you had a 300,000-hectare park how many people are going to go for a two-day trek to see, they're not. Not when you could already do that now and we know they are not coming here to do that

There is not going to be somewhere where they're going to be held in captivity for them to see and hold. If I've ever got international tourists here or friends or relatives who are here and I want them to see a koala I take them to one of the two golf courses around here. They are a bit more used to humans, they are a bit lower down the trees and because the lawns and stuff are manicured they are everywhere. You're not guaranteed to see them, but they are far more likely to be there than we're going to

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camp out in the bush for three weeks and hope we might see koalas, it's not going to work

Or they will be so high up a tree that you can't see them. In my life I think I've seen about five in the wild, maybe 10 if you count a few that you see off in the distance. They are an elusive animal

It was also discussed how the concept completely ignores the issue that people who work in the forests are unlikely to fit the mould of tourism operators or employees.

I do have a significant problem with tourism always being seen as the panacea, shut down the forestry industry and tourism will replace it. There is a whole lot of men and women who I know that work in the forest sector that I wouldn't want anywhere near a tourist. Their language is too vibrant for a start and they're just not that kind of people. If I go out there and talk to them I'm 6ft 4, I'm a big guy, they look down at their feet, they don't look at my face. They are doing a job they love in an environment they love, and they don't have to talk to people outside of their own crews. They're not suddenly going to be the next Steve Irwin of the forestry world

Arguments for

This topic was not discussed at length by those who are in favour of the park which means all the opinions have not been collected due to lack of engagement by the ENGOs. Those that did participate provided the following insights.

In section 3.3 the arguments given for why koalas are in need of protection from native forestry were outlined. To summarise, those opposed to native forestry in relations to koalas believe koalas to be close to extinction and need extra space in national parks in order to exist.

In addition to this position, the only other comments made were:

- There is frustration that the original concept is now being changed to suit the 'logging' industry

For example, in North East NSW at the moment we've got current government policy to create a Great Koala National Park in the Coffs Harbour hinterland. At the moment it looks really, really sad because it looks like the policy involves log it first and then create it

- The situation has become so bad, that children are now having to protest to draw attention to the plight of the koalas by engaging in physical demonstration

I think that's actually a betrayal, that's a really despicable policy. I'm watching the land use conflict. I've seen children lopped onto bulldozers. If we think that's responsible and to then say, that's the silly children's fault. I call that bullshit; I call that out

17.10 Fires and fire management

17.10.1 Summary

This section is relaying the feedback around fires and fire management. Its relevance to social licence is that fire management is partially blamed on forestry by conservationists. Those who support native forestry firmly believe the State forests are using best practice in managing the forests to prevent fires. They believe National Parks are a major culprit in creating the perfect environment for a fire to occur due to poor management practices.

Native forestry creates fires

Conservationists believe fires are more intense now than ever partially due to climate change, but in part due to native forestry. The claim is that fires are now behaving differently to how they have in the past. This is also further evidence to support their position which is forests need to return, as much as possible, to their original state.

Fire behaves differently now in places, and it causes us lots of issues around how do we respond and how do we restore that country back to somewhat like what it could be as a functional forest for biodiversity or for resource use

Native forestry had contributed to the intensity of the fires according to these KOLs. Because of the belief forestry has mismanaged the forests, this has created a fire-prone environment.

We also know that there is a bulk of evidence now that the more we log these forests the more fire prone we make them the more prone we make them to intense and frequent fires and we know right now that forests, the one thing we need to address climate change is actually to protect our forest to regenerate them and if we are going to manage them with protective fire systems fine but what we should be doing is actually making them more resilient and more tolerant against fire and we should be regenerating them

Being able to understand that a lot of the issues that we're having with fire is because of forestry as well in areas, because forestry have done the wrong thing. That's created a cascade, the mismanagement of the landscape is a big part of why the fires were so bad. It is obviously climate change that's driving it but you can't just blame climate change because even if those forests were super healthy climate change would be having impact but nowhere near what it is because they're unhealthy

Native forestry suppresses fires

Native forestry supporters believe the State forests are managed to the point where they can prevent intense fires. They have an efficient management system and combined with 'cold fire' management is effective in maintaining and controlling the undergrowth so a 'wildfire' disasters like those seen in 2019/2020 will not occur. They believe 'cold fire management' a technique used by First Nations is not practised in National Parks.

Key opinion leaders

These KOLs are highly critical of the way National Parks are managed. They do not believe the 'lock up and walk away' approach is helpful for managing fires. They believe this approach is responsible for creating far hotter fires than there needs to be due to lack of management of the undergrowth.

We look at how they managed the forests over the years, we're locking it up to stop fire getting in there, but that has clogged it up and made it unhealthy. Made a bigger fire risk, there is a real understanding of forest managers, but also in the bio diversity conversation space, building in some of these low intensity burns

Fires can be beneficial provided it occurs in conditions that are appropriate and/or the forest at that time needs a fire for forest health. Native forestry believe they understand this process and their forests benefit from this approach.

We see that in the way fire behaves in different systems. You see a healthier, in some of the areas is a benefit even though this wildfire is out of control but in some areas that's beneficial that fire in that area because forest health was ready for a fire and it wasn't too hot at that time of day, it's coming down a hill at night and burning down. In a lot of other contexts of different time of season or climate maybe it would have gone out, but it hasn't it's just burnt through. In other areas it's catastrophic

Backburning is considered an essential part of managing a fire. One KOL commented that despite there being ample evidence that backburning has been has a proven record of success in managing forests, Forestry Corporation can still be criticized for using this practice. When serious fires do occur, they are then criticized for not managing the fires properly. There can be no satisfying everyone but backburning is a practice the Forestry Corporation believe should be encouraged.

I've seen them backburning right up to the edge of the Pacific Highway and you go, that's confronting but I look at it and go, brilliant, good job, keep it up. But we've seen areas where they shut down production forests and very quickly they go after backburning, they go after fuel reduction burns because they don't like it but then when you get a mega fire go through the area, why didn't you do anything

Fires, according to one KOL have been prevalent in NSW since colonisation and most likely before then. There is evidence that throughout last century there were significant fires which were similar to the 2019/2020 fires. If a fire is not experienced in a lifetime then it is assumed one like it has never happened. The 2019/2020 fires were described as happening due to an extended drought period, trees shed limbs and when a fire starts it has the perfect conditions to flourish.

Let's put that one in context, I've heard that numerous times and then I say, did you know that in 1946 there was a fire that burnt from Batemans Bay all the way to the top of Kosciusko. You are telling me that the mega fire that we just had was more intense than anything else, did you even know that fire. There is no knowledge of that

When you read the literature and it's very dispersed and very poorly recorded there may have been three fires in the last century of that sort of magnitude. In an

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individual's lifetime they will have seen a number of fires and yes the 2019/2020 fires were really intense, there is no question about that, but we also had really significant fuel loads on the forest floor, all forests including the National Parks. We'd also been through a period of extended drought; these things are climatic related. Tree shed limbs because there is not enough water for them to keep growing, they end up as fuel loads on the forest floor

Biased coverage

A few KOLs discussed the bias in the media. From their perspective, information is mostly promoted through media outlets that only speak negatively of how fires are managed and are also only promoting one perspective and not consider all research and other perspectives.

There are some researchers out there that are not helping this argument, they are putting forward papers that talk about that exact thing and the ABC loves picking them up. Other researchers really question the credibility of some of that stuff but the people questioning the credibility don't get the airtime that the people that are proposing the proposition get

17.11 Local councils

17.11.1 Summary

The thoughts of local councils are mostly being reported separately as their conversations and opinions were quite different to those of the other KOLs.

Three local council representatives were interviewed. The main issues for all these councils include rental increases, housing shortages, homelessness and cost of living increases.

All were supportive of native forestry as it not only has a direct economic benefit to their local area but also provides a depth to their communities which would be lost should the industry be discontinued.

Their collective main criticism of forestry is the lack of contribution forestry makes towards the maintenance and upkeep of the local road network. This is a cost the councils and their ratepayers have to bear.

17.11.2 Benefits of forestry

Economic contribution

The first benefit of forestry to the local community is the economic input made via the industry directly and through supporting services.

In one council there are four large sawmills, fifty-eight people are directly employed in 'sawmill product' and the industry is estimated to be worth 6.5 million dollars. For another council, the activity in the area has slowed over the past 20 years but there are still 'significant' mills in the area and there are many businesses that were reported to either 'directly or indirectly' reliant on forestry. For this council it is one of the top five contributors to the local GDP. For both these councils, the absence of native forestry will significantly reduce the economic strength of their council.

Not only do you have the activity that's undertaken in the State Forest by the operators, and we have a FEDC, I can't remember what that acronym is. They're a local company, significant employer, they probably have 20 to 30 employees who operate in the State Forest

An example of a flow-on then we then advocate Byron Power which is bioenergy power generator and Broadwater. They take a lot of the timber residues out of the forest either as part of the thinning's or as actual logging themselves. They then operate a renewable energy facility within the region, again will employ about 20 to 30 people generating green renewable power there

We have quite a few heavy diesel mechanics that will service those industries and again they're not specialised just into that industry but having diversity of work across a number of industries obviously making them a viable business within the [Council area]

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One council discussed businesses that have developed because of forestry and are reliant on the by-product or wastage of forestry to make their products.

The timber industry is one that has done that for some time, it is not just about the logging, it's then the processing and then also we have regionally also then had value add to things like manufactured timber products. Taking the residues and rebuilding them into compressed fibre boards, those sorts of things

Strong local support

Councils feel there will be support for the timber industry in their LGA. They accept there will be a smaller percentage who are against forestry, many who have no opinion but even more who believe it is a viable industry producing an important product. They feel people outside of the community will not have the same feelings about what goes on in a particular area but for these three councils, the native forestry industry plays a strong community role that is highly valued and would be missed should it no longer operate.

Within our community there is a significant percentage of the population that benefit from it financially. Whether it be directly or indirectly, it is part of our community. You will find the further east you head towards the coast you get people that aren't involved that don't benefit from it but think that they're entitled to have an opinion, go no there's no social licence for it, well it's not part of your community but that doesn't prevent them from having an opinion and make comments like, where it happens yes there is. There is a distinction between the community it's happening within

Concerns about industry closure

The concerns around the closure of the native forestry industry for councils is:

- It would be devastating to the local economy

It will lead to loss of jobs and loss of GDP for us. Again, how much that flows on through the community will depend on what percentage it is of people's businesses but it will have an impact. If you look at villages like xxx, which was very much a timber, it's on the edge of the large State Forest holdings. It was incredibly severely impacted by the bushfires, it's struggling to regain any community there because of the downturn in that timber industry and the impacts on the fire and that

- Local communities will become non-existent and those there socially isolated

Those communities you lose them once they lose that economic influence and somewhere like xxx that's probably 30 minutes from anywhere else you end up with people almost socially isolated there. The jobs disappear, it's almost too far to travel and again when you don't have workers there the pub shuts down and the little shop shuts down, it's those sorts of impacts on those small communities that rely on it for a disproportionate percentage of their income etcetera. For a bigger town like Casino, it would have some impact but it's probably not going to have significant outcomes. For

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those smaller villages that are set up around mills and that it will have devastating impacts

- Unemployment of locals will be a major problem as those who will find themselves might not have transferable skills. There is genuine concern for how these people will be re-employed
- Pressure will begin to find alternative wood sources. Overseas options are not seen as viable as this is considered to be exploitation
- There is little support for re-employment being found in the tourism industry. Those who work in forestry are not suited to the types of jobs found in tourism

I've known a couple of people who have been redeployed from the timber industry over the years when the international parks and that sort of thing, my comment would be they are totally different industries. A person who has worked in the timber industry normally isn't the pick who you would put in the tourist industry

- Economic versatility is important in a local economy. Tourism is not an adequate replacement to native forestry and if it is to be a replacement then money needs to be invested now into these councils so it can start to build that industry. In an ideal world both would coexist and add greater diversity to their LGAs

It's all fine to say let's shift from one to the other, what would be better is to promote both. Open up those opportunities, make it a viable, again as I said those communities struggle as they are relying on it solely. If you take it away you won't replace it with something else, and it comes back to what we were saying about value add from an agricultural produce, how you turn it into something that broadens its economic base. You don't cut part of it out you add onto it. We have an example in the State Forest here where they've developed mountain bike paths and that, it does contribute to tourism, we think particularly where at the moment they're developing a rail trail. It would go from Murwillumbah, the train line there was a line from Casino to Murwillumbah that has been closed for some years. They've opened 17kms of the Murwillumbah section, the stats it's some amazing figure that they thought they would get 7,000 visitation in the first six months or something, don't quote the figures. It took something like two weeks to get what they thought in six months. In the six months I think they've had 70,000, it's just mind blowing how big of an impact it has had

17.11.3 Difficulties with 'activist groups'

Each council discussed the difficulty of dealing with 'local activist groups'. Local councils are often subjected to protests about various local issues. They find it frustrating mostly due to what they consider ill-informed concepts and information the protestors have.

One council participant described how they were approached by a member of their community who was complaining about the lack of housing in the local area. This participant explained to them that the only available land to develop has met with public opposition. The

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member of the local community knew about the proposed development because they were one of the people who were protesting against it. These are regular types of situations they find themselves in and there was common agreement these types of local community members can be very difficult to manage.

Personal opinions

The personal observations raised in these interviews about native forestry are:

- In the past, those in the forests did not have big machinery for cutting the trees that are now available. This KOL wonders if more care was taken back then because they were careful about not harming other trees or the environment. They also wondered if there was less waste before heavy machinery was used
- One discussed how they have observed the industry rarely makes any public statements. They believe this is because they do not want to draw much attention to themselves. This council representative believes this is a mistake. This strategy allows people to go to sites where the information is inaccurate. They have met 'many' community members who have ill-formed ideas based on the information sources they go to
- A suggestion was made that forestry should inform people about their industry and suggested there were three main areas they could educate people about which are:
 - Production
 - Conservation
 - Nature
- One council representative is sceptical of people's intentions. They discussed the following scenario:
 - The council needed to relocate the local rubbish tip and made that information public
 - The area had been of no interest to the public prior to this announcement
 - Immediately after the announcement, there were 22 koala sightings
 - This KOL described how it is difficult not to be cynical sometimes

Attitude to Forestry Corporation

One council KOL has had some recent interactions with Forestry Corporation. They feel Forestry Corporation has been trying to be more engaging with council in more recent times. They have come to council with some information requests. This has been mutually beneficial because it has allowed council to have some discussions with Forestry Corporation and they have been able to gain a better understanding of what it is they are doing. It is important to council to be across Forestry Corporations movements and plans so council can be proactive around those activities. The appreciated Forestry Corporation being transparent.

This KOL felt if Forestry Corporation wanted to improve their social licence to operate, they could find ways to give back more to the community. These do not have to be grand offerings but ones that demonstrate they are connected to the local community.

18 Report tools

18.1 Qualitative research

18.1.1 Focus group discussion guide

Establishing rapport

- How long lived in the area
- What people like and dislike about living in the local area
 - Explore local issues that impact them

Introduce forestry

- What role does wood play in your life
 - Home
 - Outside of your home
- How valuable is wood to our world
 - Benefits
 - Environmental
 - Local area
 - Broader community
- Where does Australia's wood come from
 - Awareness of hardwood (eucalyptus) v softwood (pine)
 - Explore understanding of what the difference is
 - Show 1st slide on PowerPoint as a discussion point

Different types of forests

- Difference between a State Forest and a National Park
 - State forests and National Parks have a number of similarities, they are both publicly-owned and managed and they both provide habitat for native plants and animals.
 - The main difference is that State forests have multiple use objectives while National Parks are managed specifically for biodiversity conservation.
 - NSW State forests supply much of State's domestic timber needs and include plantations (softwood and hardwood) as well as native forests. State forests tend to have more roads suitable for 4wding and allow mountain biking and dogs on leashes.
 - National Parks also encourage recreation however permits are required and there are more constraints on where you can go and what you can do. In NSW there are nearly three and a half times more National Park (7.5M ha) than State forest (2.2 M ha).

- How important are these to NSW
- What like/don't like about them

Forestry

- What understood by this term
- Where does forestry take place in NSW
 - How much forestry takes place in NSW
- Benefits of Forestry
- Are forests well looked after
 - Evidence of good practice
 - Evidence of bad practice
- PowerPoint slide deck shown
 - Capture responses

Information

- Where do people think they get their information about forestry from
 - How do they know what is true and what isn't true
 - Where do they expect to hear about information on forestry

Koala Park - Coffs Harbour

- Awareness of National park proposed near Coffs Harbour
 - What expect from a Koala Park
 - Advantages of the park
 - Disadvantages of the park
 - Would they go on a holiday to Coffs Harbour to visit
- Extinction of Koalas
 - Belief in this concept
 - Why hold belief (yes or no)
 - Threats to koalas

Response to terms

- Wood chipping
- Regrowth forests
- Old growth forest
- Rainforest
- Regeneration

- Logging
- Selective Harvesting
- Mechanical harvesters
- Thinning forest
- Active management of forests (burning, weed and pest control, encouraging forests to be productive)
- Renewable

Conclusion

- Forestry (Hardwood)
 - What is ideal
 - What is acceptable/unacceptable
 - If native forestry industry closes in Australia, what could be the impact
 - Loss of jobs [Moderator to suggest if not suggested]
 - Timber sourced from tropical rainforests in countries with little regulation
 - Forest protection and maintenance
- Trust
 - Is forestry an activity they trust
 - Why/why not
 - What would it take for trust to develop

18.1.2 Discussion guide - KOLs

The discussion guide for the KOLs was 'unstructured'. Unlike the focus groups, because the KOLs had specific topics or areas they wanted to be captured as part of this report, following a dedicated discussion guide was not always appropriate.

Below are the range of topics that were on the discussion guide that were could have been introduced, interviewee permitting.

Introduction

Who I am and what my role is in the project

Privacy aspects of the research:

- KOL had been randomly chosen from a list provided
- If they were being recorded it was for my purposes only
- If the interview was not recorded notes would be taken
- Their identity will be protected

Native hardwood forestry Forestry

- What is their position on this industry
 - Benefits of Forestry
 - Downside to forestry
- How important is to their local area
- Are forests well looked after
 - Evidence of good practice
 - Evidence of bad practice
- Where does forestry take place in NSW
 - How much forestry takes place in NSW
- Implications if there hardwood forestry ceased in NSW

Cost of living

Strong feedback from people in the community

- Cost of living is going up
- Housing is a major issue - other issues they can think of

Forestry Corporation

- Attitude and opinions

Private Native Forestry

- Thoughts about PNF

Koalas and Great National Koala Sanctuary

- Thoughts and feedback

Conclusion

- Forestry (Hardwood)
 - What is ideal
 - What is acceptable/unacceptable
 - If native forestry industry closes in Australia, what could be the impact

18.2 Quantitative Research

18.2.1 Questionnaire

Q1. Which State or Territory do you live in?

- New South Wales
- Queensland
 - Skip to: screen out
- Victoria
 - Skip to: screen out
- Western Australia
 - Skip to: screen out
- ACT
 - Skip to: screen out
- Tasmania
 - Skip to: screen out
- Northern Territory
 - Skip to: screen out
- Live outside Australia
 - Skip to: screen out

Q2. Where do you live in New South Wales?

- Sydney metropolitan area
- Blue Mountains
- Central Coast
- Richmond - Tweed
- Coffs Harbour - Grafton
- Mid North Coast
- Hunter Valley - excluding Newcastle
- Newcastle and Lake Macquarie
- Other parts of NSW

- Skip to: screen out

REGION_QUOTA APPLIED

RECODE_REGION

if

Q2.Sydney metropolitan area is true

Q2.Blue Mountains is true

Q2.Central Coast is true

then

Greater Sydney

else if

Q2.Richmond - Tweed is true

Q2.Coffs Harbour - Grafton is true

Q2.Mid North Coast is true

Q2.Hunter Valley - excluding Newcastle is true

Q2.Newcastle and Lake Macquarie is true

then

North Coast

Q3. What is your residential postcode? town and area if you do not know your postcode

Q4. Which of these age groups do you fall into?

- Under 18 years
 - Skip to: screen out
- 18 to 24 years
- 25 to 29 years
- 30 to 39 years
- 40 to 49 years
- 50 to 59 years
- 60 to 69 years

- 70 years and over

AGE_RECODE

if

Q4. Under 18 years is true

Q4. 18 to 24 years is true

Q4. 25 to 29 years is true

then

Under 30 years

else if

Q4. 30 to 39 years is true

Q4. 40 to 49 years is true

then

30 to 49 years

else if

Q4. 50 to 59 years is true

Q4. 60 to 69 years is true

Q4. 70 years and over is true

then

Over 50 years

Q5. What is your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Gender diverse

AGE_AND_GENDER_QUOTA APPLIED

Q6. Are you Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander?

- Aboriginal
- Torres Strait Islander
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- No
- Prefer not to say

Q7. Do you identify as a person with a disability?

- Yes
- No

- Prefer not to say

Q8. Do you come from a non-English speaking background?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

Q9. What is your cultural identity?

You can choose more than one option

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- Australian
- Chinese
- English
- Filipino
- French
- German
- Greek
- Indian
- Indonesian
- Irish
- Italian
- Japanese
- Korean
- Lebanese
- New Zealander
- North American
- Russian
- Scottish
- Spanish
- Thai
- Vietnamese
- Other (please tell us)

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for your time today. This survey asks you about your interest and understanding of some areas of the environment.

The survey will take 5 to 10 minutes to complete.

As with all market research your answers are completely confidential and this research complies with the Australian Privacy Act and The Research Society (TRS) Code of Professional Behaviour.

This project is being carried out by StollzNow Research. To read our Privacy Policy click [here](#).

Q10. Which of these are areas where you currently have concerns?

Select all that are concerns

- Climate change
- Overpopulation
- Overdevelopment of housing (high rise, too many new developments)
- Lack of public services (hospitals, health, public transport)
- Interest rates
- Cost of living in general
- Aged care
- Fake news
- Native forestry harvesting
- Catching Covid-19
- Social isolation
- Negativity in the world (media, social media, people in general)

- Cost of housing owning or renting
- Urban sprawl
- Offshore detention
- None of these

Q11. Thinking of trees and forests, which of these are areas where you currently have concerns?

Select all that are concerns

- Bushfires
- Land clearing for new home development
- Native forestry harvesting
- Loss of native habitat
- Land clearing on farms
- Other concern (please tell us)
- None of these

Q12. Do you know the difference between hardwood and softwood?

- Yes
- No

TIMBER_INFO

Most of the softwood which is produced in Australia is exotic pine (Radiata pine and Southern pine) that is used for house frames and trusses, decking, plywood, laminated veneer lumber, paper, cardboard and linerboard. It is not as durable as hardwood unless it is treated.

Hardwood produced in Australia comes from eucalypts that are grown in native forests and less commonly in commercial plantations. Australian hardwood is strong, naturally durable, and visually attractive coming in a variety of shades and colours. Its characteristics make it suitable for

outdoor applications where longevity and strength is important and for decorative indoor applications.

Uses include:

Flooring and decking
Panels and stairs
Power poles
Wharves and bridges
Landscaping and fencing
Industrial and mining
Furniture

Q13. Before now were you aware of these uses for hardwood in Australia?

- Yes, all uses
- Yes, some uses
- No

Q14. Do you think the home where you live has hardwood timber?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Q15. Are you aware of...

- State forests
- National Parks
- Neither of these

LOGGING_INTRO

We would now like to ask some questions about timber harvesting also known as 'logging'.

Hardwood harvesting occurs in native forests on public State forests and private land. We are going to focus on harvesting in State forests.

Q16. Before now were you aware that harvesting hardwood timber can take place on native forests on...

- Private land
- State forests
- Not aware where hardwood can be harvested

Q17. Of the publicly owned native forests in North East NSW 12% is available for producing hardwood timber and 88% is protected in conservation reserves. In any given year less than half of one percent (0.3%) of the publicly owned native forests in North East NSW are selectively harvested.

Is this...

- Much less than expected
- Less than expected
- About what expected
- More than expected
- Much more than expected

Q18. We will now show you an example of the native timber selective harvesting process.

Note: the exact location of each example is different.

Q18_1 Forest before harvest

[IMAGE DISPLAYED]

Q18_2 Forest after harvesting

[IMAGE DISPLAYED]

Q18_3 Forest seven years after harvest

[IMAGE DISPLAYED]

Q19. How do you feel about this description and images of hardwood harvesting?

- This is new information
- This makes me feel better about hardwood harvesting
- Reassuring there is a process in place
- I do not believe this
- The environment is fundamentally changed
- Explains the cycle well
- Animals will be harmed
- It can't grow back
- Other (please tell us)
- Don't know / no opinion

Q20. Do you have any concerns about hardwood harvesting in native State forests in NSW?

- Yes
- No

Q21. Which of these concerns about hardwood harvesting in native State forests in NSW do you agree with?

If you did not previously have concerns please read these to see if there are any you agree with

There is an option for 'no concerns' at the bottom of the list

- Forests should not be used for profit
- We are clearing too much land
- We send our wood overseas
- Breaching of operating rules
- Effect on biodiversity (native plant and animal life)

- Old growth trees are cut down
- Poor utilisation of forests
- Soil erosion
- Lack of regeneration
- Unprofitable industry
- Destruction of animal habitat
- Increased bushfire risk
- Damage to retained trees
- Destruction of koala habitat
- Changes to species mix
- Other concern (please tell us)
- I do not have any concerns about hardwood forestry in native forests

Q22. Do you believe there are positive outcomes from hardwood harvesting in native State forests in NSW?

- Yes
- No

Q23. Which of these positive statements about hardwood harvesting in native State forests in NSW do you agree with?

If you did not previously believe there are positive outcomes please read these to see if there are any you agree with

There is an option for 'no benefits' at the bottom of the list

- Supports regional economies
- Hardwood is ethically sourced rather than imported from unsustainable sources
- Keeps cost of building down
- Helps rural employment
- Reduces reliance on energy intensive products like tiles, concrete and steel

- Produces timber that is needed in our homes and public infrastructure
- Helps manage forests
- Reduces use of plastic
- Renewable product that is produced naturally
- It is an essential industry
- We should use Australian timber
- Keeps Australia independent
- Sustainable industry
- Well regulated industry
- Other positive (please tell us)
- I do not see any benefits in hardwood harvesting in native State forests in NSW

Q24. Which of these groups or organisations do you feel are a reliable source of information if you wanted to learn more about hardwood harvesting in NSW?

- Radio, TV and newspapers
- NSW Local Land Services
- Timber NSW
- Social media including YouTube
- Environmental groups
- People that work in the industry
- NSW Department of Primary Industries
- Friends and family
- Forestry Corporation of NSW
- NSW Environmental Protection Authority
- State Government
- None of these / don't know

Q25_INTRO We now have a number of statements where we would like you to rate your agreement. Some statements are

positive and some are negative so please pay attention to the statement. The statements are not designed to lead your opinion in any way. You can agree or disagree with each.

Q25. Hardwood forestry in native State forests in NSW is destructive and should be banned

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know

Q26_INTRO We would like you to rate the NSW forestry industry on three statements.

Q26. NSW native forest harvesting is an ethical industry

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know

Q27. Having completed this survey and considered native hardwood forestry, do you believe having a native forest timber industry is important in NSW?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Q28. Do you believe the NSW native forest timber industry should be closed?

- Yes
- No

- Don't know

END_DEMO_INTRO

Finally, we have a few more questions about you which are used to make sure we have a good cross-section of the population.

Q29. Which of these best describes your household structure?

- I live alone
- Shared household
- Couple with no kids
- Single/couple with kids, youngest child under 12
- Single/couple with kids, youngest child between 12 and 18
- Single/couple with kids, youngest child over 18 years
- Single/couple, kids left home
- Other (please tell us)

Q30. What is the highest level of education you have achieved?

- Primary school
- High school
- TAFE / Trade or business certificate
- University degree
- Postgraduate studies (PhD, Masters, Grad Diploma)

Q31. Which of these best describes your employment?

- Full Time
- Part Time

- Retired
- Student
- Home Duties
- Not currently employed

Q32. What is your household income?

This is all forms of income for the household BEFORE TAX.

If you live in a shared household it is your personal income.

- Under \$20,000
- \$20,000 to \$40,000
- \$40,001 to \$60,000
- \$60,001 to \$80,000
- \$80,001 to \$100,000
- \$100,001 to \$125,000
- \$125,001 to \$150,000
- \$150,001 to \$175,000
- \$175,001 to \$200,000
- More than \$200,000

Q33. Are there any comments you would like to make about this survey, areas you feel we have missed or issues raised by this survey?

CHECK 'NO COMMENTS BOX' IF YOU DO NOT HAVE ANY COMMENTS

NO COMMENTS

END

Thank you for your time today. This survey has been completed for North East Forestry Hub, a Commonwealth funded initiative

18.3 Desk Research

18.3.1 Desk research summary

A range of articles, papers and media clippings have been reviewed to provide background to the type of information that is circulated in the public domain about the native forest industry.

There has been no attempt to critique any of these documents used in this section of the report. A summary of the main findings is reported for each document.

These documents were used as background information to understand the complex arguments that are associated with the native forestry industry. They are background material and are included in this report purely to demonstrate that the native forestry industry was considered from multiple perspectives when approaching this research.

18.3.2 Literature review

Economic Contribution Study of the NSW hardwood timber industry - EY - February 2023

This paper was written by EY and delivered in February 2023.

The main findings are:

- The NSW timber industry provides income, economic activity and employment opportunities for those living in remote and regional communities
- The downstream industries it provides workflow to include construction, transportation and manufacturing
- Hardwood timber is in demand for:
 - Cladding, panelling, building, fencing, and agriculture products

The estimated economic contribution that the hardwood timber industry contributes was estimated as:

- \$2.9 billion in gross revenue
- \$1.1 billion in Gross Value Add
- 8,900 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) positions

The estimated impact of the NSW hardwood timber industry in North East NSW is:

- \$1,840m in Gross Revenue
- \$700m in Gross Value Add
- 5,700 FTE positions

The North East NSW region is the most significant contributor to the hardwood timber industry. It is the largest employer and ‘more than doubles the next largest region’.

The key downstream sectors of the NSW hardwood timber industry include:

- Agriculture, forestry and fishing
- Manufacturing
- Wholesale trade
- Energy and mining
- Financial and insurance services
- Public administration and safety
- Accommodation and food services

NSW Parliament - Report no. 54

New South Wales Parliament. Legislative Council. Portfolio Committee No. 4 - Customer Service and Natural Resources. Report no. 54.

The 11 findings from the Portfolio committee in September 2022 are:

1. The demand for timber and forest products, particularly plantation softwood saw logs and fibre, in New South Wales is growing and cannot be met with existing supply
2. In the last decade, there has been no increase in additional hardwood and softwood timber plantations
3. The lack of expansion of timber plantations by the NSW Government has significantly contributed to the current timber crisis which has only been further exacerbated by recent events, including the 2019/20 bushfires
4. There has been a loss in native hardwood timber supply over successive governments with forest area taken out of harvesting and put into protected areas with little effort to compensate for the loss of wood supply through an expansion of hardwood plantations
5. The reduction in harvestable areas of public native forests and failure to expand native hardwood plantations has resulted in the loss of wood supply which has had a corresponding impact on the jobs, livelihoods and communities dependent on the timber and forest products industry. This impact has been exacerbated by the 2019/20 fires
6. The transport and haulage of timber and forest products causes significant impact on local road networks
7. Dual consent requirements are an unnecessary element in the private native forestry approval process that significantly impacts the ability of landholders to diversify and improve revenue streams from their property
8. On balance, dual consent requirements can be removed whilst ensuring that concerns over local road maintenance and broader community feedback are adequately addressed

9. The NSW Government has failed to substantially deliver on the four priority pillars outlined in its NSW Forestry Industry Roadmap:
 - Regulatory modernisation and environmental sustainability
 - Balancing supply and demand
 - Community understanding and confidence
 - Industry innovation and new markets
10. The deficiencies in the Great Koala National Park Economic Impact Assessment and Environmental Benefit Analysis, as prepared for the National Parks Association, are significant enough that they cannot be relied upon to make a rigorous and objective decision on the proposal to establish the Great Koala National Park
11. There is untapped potential for innovation in the timber and forest products industry that the NSW Government should be doing more to capitalise on

Destination North Coast - Stafford Strategy- July 2020

This piece of research was conducted by Stafford Strategy and presented in July 2020. The purpose of this research was to undertake detailed visitor analysis of the 'Destination North Coast' region.

Methodology

Included in this research was 14 local government areas (LGAs) which spread from the Queensland border to Tea Gardens / Hawkes Nest. Included in these LGAs were:

- Coastal destinations
- Rural and hinterland towns and villages
- 89 National Parks
- Two World Heritage listed locations

Key findings

Activities that visitors engage in these areas include:

- Beaches
- Fishing
- Whale watching
- Trekking
- Mountain biking
- Snorkelling
- Visits to cultural sites and attractions

Activities that visitors engage in these areas include:

- Beaches
- Fishing
- Whale watching
- Trekking
- Mountain biking
- Snorkelling
- Visits to cultural sites and attractions

Visitors

The information assessed in the report was based on visits, not visitors. One visitor could have multiple visits to the same or different areas.

- Byron shire is the most visited with 2.1m visits, followed by Mid-coast and Tweed
- The least visited were Lord Howe Island, Kyogle, Bellingen and Nambucca
- In 2019, the LGAs within the North Coast region received a total of 13.9m non-unique visits by domestic day, domestic overnight and international overnight travellers
- Visitor demand were determined to fall into three clusters:
 - Mid Coast and Port Macquarie - Hastings
 - Coffs Harbour and Clarence valley
 - Byron and Tweed
- The North Coast region is dominated by domestic visitors and these are mostly from Queensland and NSW
- Areas mostly rely on people to drive to the destination due to the cost of flights and limited coach services
- Visitors are often those who are travelling for business, education or visiting friends and relatives although holiday travel accounts for 53% of all trips
- International visitors have increased from 2006 - 2019 with the increase in growth coming from Eastern countries rather than European, although European visitors are still accounting for more visitors
- October - March is the most popular time to visit

Branching out - Blueprint institute

‘Exploring Alternative Land Use Options for Native Forests in New South Wales’

This papers contention is there is no economic case for logging in North East NSW

- 'It is a loss making enterprise, subsidised by Forestry Corporation of NSW profitable softwood plantation division' and injections from the NSW government (at the taxpayers expense)
- The paper asserts that ceasing logging in 2024 will be of greater economic value as the land will be then available for carbon sequestration and tourism and combined, these will be valued at \$45 million
 - This figure includes the estimated cost of providing transitional packages to the industry as it shuts down and the breaking of the 2028 wood supply agreement
 - Of the support packages were removed there would be a net benefit of \$260.1 million dollars
- The \$45 million, or \$201.1 million would be made by:
 - Abating and average of .45 million tonnes of carbon annually
 - Tourism over 17 years will earn \$120 million
 - By 2040, \$294 million will have been made

The recommendations made were:

1. Immediately cease all government subsidies
2. Create a 'natural capital' weighting that increases the Benefit Cost Ratio of native forests when Expenditure Review Committee decisions affecting them are made.
3. Legislate the end of native forest logging in New South Wales.
4. Expand land valuation methodologies to include carbon storage, tourism and water.
5. Expand hardwood timber plantations to meet hardwood demand.
6. Incentivise private investment in timber plantations.
7. Expand formal policy mechanisms aimed at conserving native forests.

Frontier economics - Transition support for the NSW native forest sector

- A report for the WWF - May 2022

This paper was written for the WWF with the purpose of demonstrating the likely impact of Forestry Corporation of NSW (FCNSW) ceasing native forest logging. The assertions are:

- Financial returns and economic contribution of FCNSW native business are small
 - Poor returns to the NSW taxpayers
 - Hardwood businesses are not covering costs
 - Production will be limited due to the poor quality of the forests and the impact of climate change
 - The reduction of the availability of timber will lead to an even further decline in employment

- Native forestry directly employs 1070 people across the state. This includes FCNSW employees, harvest/haulage and mills
- Because of the small economic contribution native forestry makes, the businesses and jobs are highly valued so support packages would be required. These would include:
 - Redundancy top-up payments
 - Support for harvest/haulage contractors and mills through 'capital redundancy payments, grants for transition and remediation and contract buy backs'
 - Longer term funding to diversify local regional economies and create jobs
 - Longer term support for increased investment in softwood plantation resources
- The cost of expanding softwood plantations would be absorbed by the FCNSW
- Additional revenue would be gained by the following aspects not requiring funding:
 - Avoiding ongoing structural adjustment and bushfire support to the hardwood sector
 - FCNSW not receiving funding
- Alternative employment opportunities are:
 - Recreation and tourism
 - Plantation based employment
 - Fire and invasive species management
 - Management of carbon and biodiversity credits

Great Koala National Park

University of Newcastle - February 2021

The major findings of this report are:

- The Great Koala National Park (GKNP) is the first national park designed to protect koala habitats
- It adds an additional 175,000 hectares of native state forests to protected areas to establish a 315,000 hectare reserve in the NSW Mid North Coast
- The boundaries of this site is thought to contain 20% of the koala population of NSW with 4, 550 koalas
- It is estimated the park will generate \$1.2 billion dollars over the next 15 years and 1.7 billion in biodiversity value
- It is estimated that the park will generate an increase in regional economic output of \$1.2 billion dollars of which \$531 million will flow into the regions economy including \$330 million in additional wages
- Additional benefits:
 - 9,800 additional full-time jobs
 - \$145 million in capital expenditure over 15 years
 - \$128 million in operating expenditure over 15 years

- An additional 1 million visitors to the region who will spend \$412 million
- There is the potential to increase domestic and international visitors will increase
- 675 direct forestry related jobs will be phased out over 10 years
- The assessment shows that the environmental benefits equate to added biodiversity value of approximately:
 - \$530 million for the NSW population
 - \$1.7 billion for all Australians.

18.3.3 Media clipping

Media clipping 1: Land clearing figures shows 50pc reduction in three years in Queensland, but conservatives warn it is not enough

- ABC Rural - Tuesday 1 August
- Link: [Land clearing figures show 50pc reduction in three years in Queensland, but conservationists warn it is not enough - ABC News](#)

The opening statement is:

‘Fewer trees have been cut down in Queensland, but some conservationists are calling for the laws to be tightened further to protect endangered species such as koalas’

Key points are:

- Land clearing in Queensland had reduced by 49% from 2020/21 from 2018/19
 - 67% of re-growth was on land that had been pasture
- 349,000 hectares were cleared 2020-2021
- In 2018, the Queensland government strengthened legislation to prevent ‘unsustainable’ clearing. This limited land that could be cleared for the purpose of ‘high value agriculture’
- The government vowed to work closely with landowners to help them understand their obligations
- Environmental groups comments are:
 - The Wilderness Society said Category X, land that was previously cleared, should also be covered by the legislation
 - This land is key habitat for koalas
- Agforce (Industry group) said clearing did not always mean stripping it of its trees and that there are occasions when clearing was done for environmental management
 - Clearing can improve the biodiversity of species
- According to the data, 47pc of the cleared land was in the Great Barrier Reef catchment areas

- The Wilderness Society said clearing can lead to sediment run-off which puts the Great Barrier Reef in danger and contributes to climate change
- Agforce says there needs to be more research into determining if this is true

Media clipping 2: Labor's destruction of the Victorian timber industry threatens forests

- Spectator / Australia - Senator Ralph Babet - 31 July 2023

Opening statement is:

The accelerated destruction of the native timber industry in my home state of Victoria is a disgrace. This industry has been a vital part of Victoria's regional economy for more than 170 years. It is the lifeblood of many regional towns and provides employment for around 4,500 people and their families

Key points are:

- Danial Andrews is forcing the native timber industry to close in 6 months rather than till 2030
 - This does not allow people to transition onto other jobs
- Country towns will be destroyed
 - 900 workers will lose their jobs
 - Companies are being forced to close
- The decision seems at odds with the Labor Party's position as the party for the workers
- Children are in tears because their parents won't have jobs next year
- Parents are stressed about their future survival (food, mortgages)
- Schools and football clubs will be forced to close
- The decision by Danial Andrews is designed to 'chase the green votes in inner city electorates'
- Labor and the Greens ignore the work done by the regulator to ensure the long-term health and productivity of the native forest continues
- Sustainable logging prevents super fires
- The ways the forests are protected are:
 - Logs selectively
 - Regenerates native species
 - Creates healthy resilient forests which provides a home for flora and fauna
- The native timber industry has taken the same approach as their 'fire-stick farming by maintaining firebreaks and access roads, reducing fuel loads, and conducting prescribed burning'
- The Andrews government does not care about this industry because it is not worth enough votes to them

Media clipping 3: After the chainsaws, the quiet: Victoria's rapid exit from native forest logging is welcome - and long overdue

- The Conversation - David Lindenmayer - May 2023

Opening statement

By the end of the year, Victoria's trouble-plagued native forest industry will end - six years ahead of schedule. The state's iconic mountain ash forests and endangered wildlife will at last be safe from chainsaws. And there will be no shortage of wood - there's more than enough plantation timber to fill the gap

Key points are:

- The decision to end native forestry in Victoria is the best outcome for the economy and the threatened species
- By bringing it forwards from 2030, it is equal to removing 730,000 petrol or diesel cars
- Logging damages the biodiversity
- Many animals, including the greater glider, to be endangered
- Native forestry (86%) is used for low value products such as woodchips, paper pulp and boxliners
 - Native timber does not help build houses
- VicForests runs at a loss and has been doing so for many years
- Timber can be sourced from the 'abundant' eucalyptus and pine plantations
- Logging pushes species into decline. The Leadbeater Possum is critically endangered and 50 other species are threatened and this is due to logging
- The authors have seen firsthand old growth forests of high conservation value be clearfelled. They have seen essential habitat such as large old trees 'with their all-important' nesting hollows become rarer and rarer'
- The Southern Great Glider is now endangered and yet once it was a common species
- Intact landscapes become dominated by 'highly inflammable young forest at risk of extremely severe wildfires'
- 70% of Victoria's mountain ash forests are critically endangered are either disturbed from wildfire or logging
- Economic reasons:
 - VicForests announced a loss of \$54 million and a loan of \$80 million
 - Victoria will be \$190 million better off not having native forestry
- Years of logging have created the following:
 - Warped the composition of tree species in the forest
 - There is not enough food supply for the koalas and greater gliders

- Fire, evasive species and deer need to now be better managed
- Plantation
 - Currently 95% of plantation eucalypt logs is grown is processed overseas
 - Plantation sector needs more workers for haulage and processing
- Jobs created will be:
 - Forest restoration, firefighting, feral animal control, carbon stock management
- Great Forest National Park in the Central Highlands needs to be declared

Media clipping 4: Labor push for publicly owned plantations to end native forest logging

- The Guardian - <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/jul/26/labor-push-for-publicly-owned-plantations-to-end-native-forest-logging> - July 26 2023

Opening statement

Party's environment lobby group wants forestry policy focused on restoring native forests, arguing they have more value as a carbon and biodiversity sink

Key points are:

- 300 Labor branches have backed a push by the party's environmental arm for the Albanese government to fund an expanded, publicly owned plantation industry to ensure the country will have enough timber and be able to end native forestry
- The Land Environment Action Network (LEAN) has produced a report which is asking Labor to support a policy that will end native forestry
 - Forests are better is treated as carbon and biodiversity sink
 - Native forestry produces lowly products such as woodchips, pallets and power poles
- The report says the government should create a state-owned national plantation estate that will increase our 'domestic timber independence'
- 90% of Australia's timber comes from plantations and 12% from native forestry
- 400,000 hectares of planation timber will have to be planted to meet Australia's needs
 - This will create 1800 jobs (more than the 1100 employed in native timber)
- Planning for this change needs to consider the following:
 - Careful choice of species and where they are planted
 - Plan for a manufacturing facility
 - To be recognised is the increased fire risk and 'diminishing water' due to climate change
- LEAN did not suggest the immediate stopping of native forestry