

REEF SUBMISSION: **SENATE ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS** **LEGISLATION COMMITTEE**



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Nature Positive (Environment Protection Australia) Bill 2024 [Provisions] and related bills

The Resources Energy & Environment Foundation (REEF) is made up of people with a range of skills and interests from a diverse group of communities. Their common aim is to improve regional communities through the environment, the wellbeing of its people and future growth.

REEF urges the Albanese Labor Government to consider the environmental contribution to the nation made by those working in the native hardwood timber industry in NSW, when considering its new Environment Protection Australia and Environmental Protection & Biodiversity Conservation legislation.

Workers in the NSW native hardwood timber sector create managed forests which encourage koalas to live and eat in them and prevent catastrophic bush fires. They produce around \$2.9 billion of hardwood timber for Australian housing, construction, mining, railway and infrastructure. Native hardwood timber forest workers are proud environmental custodians, sustaining a precious commodity for future generations. Native hardwood trees take 30-50 years to reach maturity before they can be harvested.

For every native hardwood tree harvested, more than one tree is replanted or regrown. We recognise the need to have and expand hardwood plantations. However, they are complimentary to the vast area of native hard wood forest currently available and essential to meet the timber resource needs, have a different forest ecology (mono forest) and are not suitable for several hardwood species that grow in a natural hardwood multi-forest such as Tallowwoods.

Retaining a sustainable and environmentally responsible native hardwood timber industry is essential for Australia's future, its sovereignty and communities in the NSW region. Native hardwood timber is sustainably harvested in accordance with strict regulatory codes to protect the regrowth of forests and flora and fauna in both:

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State Forests: State native forests and plantation forests are managed by Forestry Corporation NSW and controlled by State/Federal Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs). They set harvestable areas overseen by the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) using the NSW Integrated Forest Operations Agreement (IFOA).

Private Native Forests: Privately owned forest land and some plantations. Regulated by Local Land Services (LLS) using the Private Native Forest Code of Practice. Also subject to review by the EPA.

Management and harvesting of hardwood timber assists in sequestering carbon. They are the ultimate renewal which can be continually regrown and harvested, reducing the high carbon input where steel, plastic and concrete are used. Harvested trees are replaced with new ones through natural seeding, regrowth or plantation, which provides continual carbon storage.

Flora and Fauna are protected and nurtured in areas where the native hardwood timber industry operates. Key benefits of the sector for the environment are:

1. Food and nesting trees and established seed trees are highly valued and protected.
2. Continual management of the forest and forest floor and fuel loads, to reduce wildfires and provide corridors for wildlife to travel.
3. Continual regrowth provides new trees with fresher, more succulent leaves and fruit for fauna such as koalas.
4. Most wildfires start in unmanaged forest areas (including National Parks) that are not controlled which often causes severe loss of human life, animals and plants. Uncontrolled bush fires can have a devastating and long-lasting impact on native hardwood forests and the environment. Management of NSW State Forests includes weed and pest controls and regular hazard reduction burning.

A sustainable, responsibly maintained timber industry helps reduce reliance on overseas products. Australia imports more than \$5 billion of timber and wood products, particularly from Southeast Asia to make up the shortfall in demand.

Hardwood Timber management in NSW is balanced and is responsibly managed. Decisions are made on how to meet the growing demand in the future. Forestry Corporation of NSW manages around two million hectares of native hardwood forest, 35,000 hectares of hardwood plantations, and 225,000 hectares of softwood (pine) plantations. The available harvesting area of State Forests in NSW is less than 12 percent. Of this, a little more than one percent of the forest is subjected to selective harvesting each year, which is then regenerated for future use.

Forestry Corporation's forestry management operation is world class with this work undertaken:

- a) A 100-year strategic plan for sustainable management.
- b) A tactical 10-year desktop planning is supported by a 3-year field study validation.
- c) Site planning for harvesting is carried out over 1-2 years for studies in ecology, cultural, mapping, field marking and logistics.
- d) Operational monitoring on a month-to-month cycle is in place to ensure forests are managed appropriately and in accordance with regulations and legislation.
- e) Regulation and certification of forestry practices to Australian and World standards is met by certification under the Australian Standard for Sustainable Forest Management as provided by the certified Responsible Wood Group that reviews applicable standards (RW/1-21-5, PEFC/21-

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23-05). Forestry practices must comply with the NSW Coastal Integrated Forest Operations Agreement (CIFOA) regulated by the NSW Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) and requirements under the Regional Forest Agreement between the Federal and State Governments.

A growing Australian population and greater demand for a carbon friendly sustainable product requires the native hardwood timber sector to responsibly look to meet Australia's needs rather than rely on imports.

REEF supports responsible research measures that deliver a vibrant native hardwood timber sector for regional communities, the economy and the nation for the future. Key considerations:

- A reliable timber source that is sustainable and properly managed, provides continued employment and is a core renewable resource for the construction, infrastructure and related industries in NSW.
- Native Hardwood timber has qualities not available in other species including plantation hardwoods, such as durability, strength, fire resistance and natural appeal.
- Tallowood, Ironbark, Turpentine, Mahogany are only available in native hardwood forests. They are used in structural and infrastructure projects such as railways, mining, wharves, jetties, bridges, fencing, farming.
- Specialty hardwood native timbers such as Brush Box and Blackbutt are used as feature timbers in iconic buildings and structures like the Sydney Opera House, Sydney Darling Harbour Wharf Precinct at Barangaroo and Federal and NSW Parliaments.
- The native hardwood timber sector contributes more than \$2.9 billion in gross revenue to the NSW economy and \$1.1 billion in gross value add. It is estimated there are more than 8900 direct jobs in NSW and up to 22,000 people employed across the state considering the supply chain from forest management to retail products.
- Many regional communities depend on the ongoing operation of the native hardwood timber industry.
- Wood products have been used around the world throughout history and continue to be in demand today. A growing forest captures carbon, can be sustainably managed, climate and environmentally friendly, versatile, safe, healthy, dependable and cost effective.

In NSW this process of regulation, management and accountability is built into the sector and governs how it operates each day to meet community expectations. There is a high demand for native hardwood timber products. While we support regulation and monitoring of industry practices, it is important to ensure it enables the native hardwood sector to continue and progress without causing an unnecessary burden, duplication and undue compliance costs.

Finally, the native hardwood timber sector highly values flora and fauna, including the safety of koalas. REEF proposes NSW and indeed Australia, maintain and grow a self-sustaining timber capability.

Mr Noel Atkins
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REEF Forestry Awareness Program Chair