

Hon Mr Zappia, MP

Chairman, House of Reps Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and the Arts
Parliament House, Canberra, ACT

20 February 2013

Dear Mr Zappia

At the Committee meeting I attended on Thursday February 14 I was asked if I could provide more detail about my suggestion to establish a national inquiry into the role and management of Australia's native forests. I am happy to do so.

The Standing Committee on Agriculture, Resources, Fisheries and Forestry (ARFF) has addressed a range of policy issues bearing on the future of Australian forestry and the forest industries including wood supply and demand, wood imports, forest plantations, farm forestry and carbon sequestration.

I suggest that we are yet to address in a comprehensive way the basic issue of the future of our native forests, in particular the role, and management, of native forests and ways in which an appropriate balance between wood production and environmental conservation might be achieved. Taken in conjunction with the recommendations of ARFF, such an inquiry could help resolve the current level of uncertainty about the continuing role of these forests. Regional Forest Assessments have not always met this purpose in an objective and transparent way, or taken full account of all circumstances bearing on the forest land use decisions. Political activism has sometimes influenced these decisions to an unjustifiable extent.

The Committee might consider a comprehensive inquiry into the role, and management, of the native forests. This could provide a framework not only for future land-use decisions but also for management regimes which effectively integrate wood production, environmental conservation and all other forest values.

The Inquiry might address among other matters:

- (i) The compatibility of wood production and environmental conservation within different forests and under different circumstances
- (ii) Silvicultural and other management practices which effectively integrate wood production, environmental and social values
- (iii) The extent to which national conservation objectives can be met through a balanced mix of conservation reserves and production forests
- (iv) The range of economic, social, and other contributions the wood production forest can make to society
- (v) The extent to which wildfire management will be enhanced within the wood production forest
- (vi) The formulation of an objective and transparent land use review process which takes full account of all relevant circumstances bearing on land use decisions
- (vii) The extent to which governments will, in recognising their duty of care for the nation's forests, accept management costs beyond returns realised through commercial operations.

I am confident that such an inquiry would receive a high level of support from academic and research institutions, Australian forest management agencies and the Institute of Foresters of Australia.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ross Florence', is written over a light blue rectangular background.

Dr Ross Florence
Honorary member and Fellow of the Institute of Foresters of Australia