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Chair, Mr Peter Duncan AM
Independent Forestry Panel
On behalf of NSW Government

Dear Chair and esteemed Panel Members,

Submission to the independent review of the Forestry Industry Action Plan

Vets for Climate Action welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the review of the NSW Forestry Industry Action Plan.

Climate change is hurting the animals we love and care for. Vets for Climate Action represents concerned veterinarians, veterinary nurses, practices and industry partners across Australia who want immediate action on climate. Veterinary professionals are on the frontline, experiencing climate change firsthand. We see the devastating impacts that floods, bushfires and heat stress have on our livestock, pets and wildlife (such as the inconsolable loss of 3 billion animals in the bushfires of 2019/20). Climate change is an animal health and welfare issue. Many animals have already perished in Australia due to heatwaves and severe weather events. We also understand that animal health has a critical position in our future, whether the diversity of native wildlife contributing to a sustainable environment, the livestock that contribute to our food security or our much-loved pets.

We are mobilising the veterinary profession and broader animal care community to tackle the climate emergency within and beyond our sector. We are educating the profession and Australian community about the impact of climate change on the animals. We are reducing the sector's greenhouse gas emissions through our Climate Care Program. We are collaborating with like-minded, values-aligned organisations - because we cannot do this alone. And, we are advocating for strong leadership on climate action on behalf of all animals.

Vets for Climate Action supports an end to all native forest logging, and urges the panel to recommend an industry plan to end native forest operations immediately. We also support a just transition for those employed in the industry.

1. Sustainability of current and future forestry operations in NSW

Native forest logging is neither financially sustainable, nor environmentally sustainable.

Economically unsustainable

According to its own data, the native forests division of Forestry Corporation NSW (FCNSW) made multiple losses over successive years: \$20 million in 2020-21¹ \$9 million in 2021-22² and \$15 million in 2022-2023.³ We note that these are public funds. The NSW Government is supporting a loss-making and unpopular industry⁴ at great cost to the NSW people, its animals and environment.

Multiple reports have also provided evidence that ending native forest logging would result in net economic benefits to NSW. This ranges from a \$60 million net benefit in a 2021 report⁵ to a net benefit of \$45 million if native forest logging ceased in 2023-2024 (instead of the 2039-2040 expiry date of the North East Regional Forestry Agreement).⁶ This amount includes the estimated cost of a just transition for the forestry industry, and breaking agreements up to 2028.

Environmentally unsustainable

Additionally, the carbon emissions saved by ending native forest operations will go a long way towards assisting NSW to meeting its legislated target of cutting emissions 70% compared with 2005 levels by 2035, and reaching net zero emissions by 2050. A 2023 report showed that could prevent 76 million tonnes of carbon entering the atmosphere by 2050 as well as an economic benefit of \$2.7 billion to mitigate climate

¹ [\\$20m loss: native forest logging last year cost taxpayers \\$441 per hectare](#), Sydney Morning Herald, accessed 13 October 2024

² [NSW Forestry Corporation Annual Report FY22](#), accessed 13 October 2024

³ [NSW Forestry Corporation Annual Report FY23](#), accessed 13 October 2024

⁴ 69% of Australians support a ban on native forest logging, increasing to 70% of NSW, [The Australian Institute Polling – Ending native forest logging across Australia, April 2024](#) accessed 13 October 2024

⁵ [Comparing the value of alternative uses of native forests in Southern NSW](#), Frontier Economics, 30 November 2021, accessed 13 October 2024

⁶ [Branching Out: Exploring Alternate Land Use Options for the Native Forests of NSW](#), The Blueprint Institute, April 2023, accessed 13 October 2024

change.⁷ This is the equivalent of removing 840,000 internal combustion cars from NSW roads.

The importance of reducing carbon emissions and greenhouse gases to zero cannot be overstated. The IPCC in its Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (6th Assessment Report) is clear that if we exceed 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, the consequences will be stark: heatwaves, droughts, bushfires and intense rain events will become even more severe. Sea levels will rise, species will become extinct and crop yields and livestock production will fall. This will cause further food and water insecurity, economic disruption, conflict, and terrorism.⁸

Ending native forest logging is a real climate solution.

2. Environmental and cultural values of forests, including threatened species and Aboriginal cultural heritage values

Increasing environmental degradation, such as through the logging of our native forests, has caused several complex and interlinked challenges affecting the entire planet, including climate change, biodiversity loss, and widespread environmental pollution.

Bringing an end to native forest logging will go a long way to halting further damage, and in fact provide solutions to many of these problems.

The value of native forests are self-evident: from generating the oxygen we breathe, and filtering the polluted air we have created. They assist in the supply of clean water and food production. Native forests are also an important sink for atmospheric carbon, making them an important measure to help ameliorate rising temperatures from climate change.

Environmental values of forests

Importantly, native forests house a wealth of biodiversity, essential for the processes that support all life on Earth. Biodiversity is of fundamental importance if all ecosystems, developed over millions of years, are to continue to flourish. When any species becomes extinct, an ecosystem can lose its balance and break down.

⁷ NSW forests could provide carbon sequestration services equivalent to \$2.7 billion from now until 2050 (assuming a carbon price of \$35 a tonne), [NSW Forest Carbon](#), Dr Jen Sanger, February 2023, accessed 13 October 2024

⁸ United Nations, [The Climate Crisis – A Race We Can Win](#), 2020, accessed 13 October 2024.

A United Nations report⁹ has determined that about one million animal and plant species are threatened with extinction, many within decades, more than ever before in human history. Australia has the unenviable record of the worst mammal extinction rate in the world. The Bramble Cay melomys, a small rodent in the Torres Strait Islands, is the first mammal to become extinct due to climate change. In NSW alone 1,043 species and 115 ecological communities are listed as threatened under the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 (NSW) including 78 species declared extinct since European settlement.¹⁰ And more recently, a report from ANU has found ongoing logging in NSW affects the habitat of at least 150 species considered at risk of extinction, with thirteen of these species listed as critically endangered.¹¹

Undisturbed native forests in NSW are home to many endangered species, including Greater and Yellow-bellied Gliders, Sooty, Masked and Powerful Owls, Koalas, Quolls and Platypus. Logging of native forests threatens these animals by removing the habitat, shelter and resources they need, including older trees which have developed hollows used by multiple species. The 2019–20 bushfires burnt 64% of NSW's state forests, devastating wildlife.¹² Continued logging in these already damaged areas further threatens their survival.

Take the case study of Leadbeater's possum and southern greater glider¹³ as threatened species. Climate change is shrinking the available habitat for both these species at the same time that logging is destroying their habitat. The increased frequency and intensity of wildfires is impacting the habitat and the tree-hollows necessary for breeding. The southern glider is a foliage eating specialist whose foraging behaviour is impacted by abnormally warm nights. It cannot move higher to adapt because the tree species it prefers are displaced by other tree species at higher altitude.

Ending native forest logging in NSW forests would bring NSW into line with Victoria and Western Australia (we applaud the decision of those governments to make such positive changes for our wildlife). It will show strong action on climate change and biodiversity, and recognise the true value for our environment and animals.

⁹ [The IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services](#), 2019, accessed 13 October 2024

¹⁰ NSW EPA, [NSW State of the Environment 2021: Threatened Species](#), 2021, accessed 13 October 2024

¹¹ [More than half of NSW's forests and woodlands are gone as ongoing logging increases extinction risks, study shows](#), ANU, 5 August 2024, accessed 13 October 2024

¹² <https://www.wwf.org.au/news/news/2022/now-is-the-time-to-transition-out-of-nsw-native-forest-logging#gs.taf6d1>.

¹³ Lindenmayer, D. 2023. Forest Biodiversity Declines and Extinctions Linked with Forest Degradation; A Case Study from Australian Tall, Wet Forests. *Land* 2023. Vol 12, Pages 528. 12(3)

Cultural Value

The First People of this country have a depth of knowledge and experience from living for centuries in close harmony with the land. They know the natural environment and its resources, the use of natural resources and the relationship of their people to the land and the wild creatures.

Vets for Climate Action recognises the strong and enduring connection Aboriginal people have to the land, air and water, animals and forest. Their continuing custodianship and ability to care for country, and cultural practices on country (such as mosaic burning) must be supported. We understand and believe in the cultural value of forests to all, but especially our First Nations brothers and sisters, is incalculable and invaluable.

Native forests hold important cultural values for our First Nations people and traditional custodians.

3. Demand for timber products, particularly as relates to NSW housing, construction, mining, transport and retail

4. The future of softwood and hardwood plantations and the continuation of Private Native Forestry in helping meet timber supply needs

These questions are beyond the scope of expertise of Vets for Climate Action.

However, we understand that 90% of Australian timber comes from plantations. This would suggest that shifting to plantation timber would satisfy all of NSW's timber needs, and negate the need to log in native forests. Nor would it be necessary for the NSW Government to continue subsidising the native logging industry.

We support plans to move away from native forest logging, and shifting to plantation timber, increasing the sustainability of the practice.

5. The role of State Forests in maximising the delivery of a range of environmental, economic and social outcomes and options for diverse management, including Aboriginal forest management models

Again, this is outside the scope of Vets for Climate Action's expertise.

Very briefly, and as provided in our response to question 1, it is clear that the Forestry Corporation is not economically sustainable, and relies on Government support.

Protecting and restoring NSW forests will require an end to native forest logging, and should rely on the breadth of scientific and Indigenous expertise. Doing so will also increase the financial value of our forests through new and varied opportunities in job creation, carbon sequestration / storage, and tourism.

Aboriginal knowledge should be acquired through consultation and conversation. Their skills should be incorporated into biodiversity protection and conservation.

6. Opportunities to realise carbon and biodiversity benefits and support carbon and biodiversity markets, and mitigate and adapt to climate change risks, including the greenhouse gas emission impacts of different uses of forests and assessment of climate change risks to forests

Carbon & Biodiversity Benefits, Climate Mitigation and Adaptation

As mentioned above in our response to questions 1 and 2, forests are important in reducing the impacts of climate change. This includes as carbon sinks.

Logging in native forests is responsible for the release of large amounts of carbon, which further contributes to anthropogenic climate change. Halting native forest logging will go a long way to reducing atmospheric carbon emissions, allow forests to recover and increase their carbon storage.

It will also allow native species to flourish and replenish. Older growth forests frequently house developed nesting hollows that are much needed habitat for over 300 vertebrate animal species, including birds, mammals, frogs and reptiles and many more species of insects and spiders. Of these, at least 64 species (22%) are listed as threatened with extinction.¹⁴

Logging in forests can also increase the risk of wildfire, further threatening our much loved animals¹⁵. Over 3 billion animals were lost in the 2019-2020 bushfires, and thousands more in bushfires since.

Carbon & Biodiversity Markets

It is clear that government and business are looking for opportunities to reduce and abate carbon emissions, and add financial value to natural environments. It is also clear that forests can and will play an important role in climate change mitigation, including through carbon and biodiversity markets such as through offsets.

¹⁴ [Hollows as homes](#), Taronga Conservation Society, accessed 13 October 2024

¹⁵ D. Lindenmayer, *The Forest Wars*, 2023

As noted above in our response to question 1 and 2, there is certainly opportunity and greater value in carbon offers than logging. However, we ask that if the NSW Government and any future Forestry Industry Action Plan is to rely on offsets, they be robust and reliable at scale, permanent, verifiable, enforceable and truly support biodiversity.

Additionally any areas used for conservation and carbon offsets should be linked, rather than exist as small, discrete pockets of land. Aggregation of offsets and their placement with existing national parks or protected areas to fill in the jigsaw puzzle and extend contiguous areas will be much more effective per unit area for threatened species and their management.

CONCLUSION

Our concern as veterinarians, vet nurses and animal care professionals is to the health and welfare of all animals. We envisage a world where animals and people thrive in a healthy climate because this world does not currently exist.

All vets are taught the concept of One Health: this is the recognition that the health of people, animals and the environment are interconnected. Continued native forest logging threatens this balance.

We respectfully ask the Panel to recommend an halt to native forest logging, and to plan to end this practice immediately. The evidence is clear: we must act now to end native forest logging to save our endangered and much-loved native animals, and reduce the worst impacts of climate change.

“Forests purify our drinking water. Forests are our best hope to reduce carbon emissions. Forests preserve biodiversity. It’s time we realised the value of leaving our native forests standing”

- Prof. David Lindenmayer AO

Yours sincerely

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