

# The case against native forest logging

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There are many sound reasons why native forest logging in Western Australia should stop.

1. **Sustained yield for native forest logging has not been achieved**
2. **Low volume of sawlogs**
3. **Forest Products Commission is a failed Government Trading Enterprise**
4. **Economic impacts on beekeeping, tourism and wine industries**
5. **Decline in employment**
6. **Increased flammability**
7. **Minor source of wood**
8. **Decrease in carbon capture and storage**
9. **Increase in damage by pathogens**
10. **Increased threat to forest biodiversity**

## 1. Sustained yield for native forest logging has not been achieved

Under the current Forest Management Plan (2014-2023), sustained yield is defined as the yield of first and second grade sawlogs that the forest available for logging can produce for an extended period of time under the settings of the FMP. It includes both quantity and quality of timber. The sustained yield projections for sawlog woodflows extend to 2070 and are considered up to 2110.<sup>1</sup>

The projections have already proved wrong. Under the FMP, the annual allowable cut of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade jarrah and karri sawlogs is 192,000 m<sup>3</sup>. In 2019-2020, the Forest Products Commission (FPC) sold just 104,000 m<sup>3</sup> of these logs.<sup>2</sup>

The FPC had 62 native forest contracts of sale in 2017<sup>3</sup> but only 39 in 2020.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Low volume of sawlogs and sawn timber

WA's native forests no longer provide many logs of sawlog quality, and 85 per cent of the wood produced is fuelwood, firewood or woodchips for paper production.<sup>5</sup> Of the logs sold as sawlogs, only one-third of the log volume becomes sawn timber while two-thirds is sawmill residue or waste.

## 3. Forest Products Commission is a failed Government Trading Enterprise

The FPC is required to try to make a profit.<sup>6</sup>

“The Commission in performing its functions must try to ensure that a profit that is consistent with the planned targets is made from the exploitation of forest products while ensuring —

(a) the long-term viability of the forest products industry;”

However, in the 2020 financial year, native forestry cost taxpayers over \$1 million, and since the current FMP came into operation in 2014, native forestry has operated at a cash loss of \$15.5 million.<sup>7</sup>

The WA Auditor General recently conducted an audit of the FPC's billing and deliveries system.<sup>8</sup> She found serious shortcomings that show the FPC is irresponsible and incompetent:

- Lack of controls over reported timber volumes elevate the risk of fraud
- Network security and technical vulnerabilities are not well managed, leaving the DAB exposed to malicious attacks
- Inadequate controls could result in regulatory non-compliance
- Ineffective project governance
- Manual intervention during the billing run undermines transparency and accountability.

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1 Western Australia, Legislative Council, Question on Notice No. 1236 of 2014.

2 Forest Products Commission, *Annual Report 2019-2020*, p. 91

3 Western Australia, Legislative Council, Question on Notice No. 359 of 2017

4 Western Australia, Legislative Council, Question on Notice No. 2996 of 2020

5 Forest Products Commission, *Annual Report 2019-2020*, p. 91

6 *Forest Products Act 2000* Section 12 (1)(a)

7 Forest Products Commission, *Annual Reports*.

8 Office of the Auditor General, Western Australia. *Application Controls: Audits 2021* Report 16: 2020-21, 9 March 2021

#### **4. Economic impacts on beekeeping, tourism and wine industries**

Logging and associated burning degrade and destroy the resource base of the honey<sup>9</sup> and tourism industries, and smoke is harmful to the wine industry.<sup>10</sup> Not only does native forest logging not return a profit to the State; it is costly to important, profitable industries.

#### **5. Decline in employment**

Employment in the native forest logging industry is minimal and continues to decline as machines increasingly replace workers, and markets for low grade logs are hard to find. Estimated at 500 in 2017, when the plantation sector employed 1600,<sup>11</sup> it would be even less today. An increased plantation and farm forestry sector offers a potentially sustainable alternative for workers in the native forest logging industry.

#### **6. Increased flammability**

Logging, including thinning, makes forests more flammable.<sup>12</sup> Climate change is the key contributor to increased bushfires in Australia, with rising temperatures and more frequent and intense droughts priming the forests for burning. However, disturbance of forests by logging exacerbates the impacts of climate change.

#### **7. Minor source of wood**

Plantations already provide almost all the wood we need. In 2018-2019, 358,000 m<sup>3</sup> of wood came from WA's native forests while 4,130,000 m<sup>3</sup> came from the State's hardwood and softwood plantations.<sup>13</sup>

#### **8. Decrease in carbon capture and storage**

Forests capture and store large amounts of carbon<sup>14</sup> in the vegetation and soil. Logging and associated burning release this carbon, which is not recaptured for decades,<sup>15</sup> and the carbon in the low value products for which most native forest wood is used (charcoal, firewood and paper) is released immediately or within two years.

#### **9. Increase in damage by pathogens**

Our forests are infested with a range of damaging pathogens, both native and introduced. A local *Armillaria* fungus that infests karri trees discolours and degrades the wood and can kill young trees.<sup>16</sup> The native marri canker is killing marri trees across their range on both public and private lands.<sup>17</sup> An introduced water mould, *Phytophthora cinnamomi*, can kill jarrah trees and is fatal to many understorey species. Logging exacerbates these pathogens and increases to risk to forest health and survival posed by these and other microorganisms.

#### **10. Increased threat to forest biodiversity**

Logging and burning are the main disturbances in our forests and could lead to the extinction of endangered species of fauna and flora such as numbats, cockatoos and some banksias and orchids. Between 1999 and 2018, the number of fauna species in the south-west forest regions on WA's threatened species list increased from 19 to 42, and the number of flora species went from 79 to 113.<sup>18</sup> Very little is known about the impacts of logging and burning on invertebrates and fungi.

It is convenient to blame introduced predators (cats and foxes) and claim they are the main threat to native fauna but this ignores the fact that logging and burning kill many creatures and destroy their forest habitat, depriving them of both food and protective shelter.

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9 Western Australian Beekeeping Industry The Ecological Impact of a Prescribed Burning Regime BEEINFORMED Newsletter of the Western Australian Beekeeping Industry

10 Australian Wine Research Institute Smoke taint [https://www.awri.com.au/industry\\_support/winemaking\\_resources/smoke-taint/](https://www.awri.com.au/industry_support/winemaking_resources/smoke-taint/)

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13 Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES), Volume of logs harvested by State and forest type, Data sets 2020.

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18 Western Australia, Legislative Council, Question on Notice No. 1883 of 2019, Table Paper No. 2555