



**TIMBER NSW**

# Private Native Forestry Review

**Private native forests in New South Wales are a largely underutilized natural resource, subject to complex and overly prescriptive regulation.**

**Private native forestry must be embedded within the government's broader plans to achieve biodiversity conservation and improved socio-economic outcomes.**

**Private native forestry should be integrated into one governance framework with other agricultural activity.**



## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PRIVATE NATIVE FORESTRY

Private native forests constitute 8.85 million hectares, or 40 per cent of New South Wales' total native forest estate (22.3m ha). The balance of this estate is split between leasehold forest (5.7m ha) and forests that are publicly owned and managed (7.6m ha).

Of the native forest in public ownership, only 13 per cent (one million hectares) is managed for its timber values. As such, while not all private native forests are suitable for timber production, the farming community has responsibility for managing the vast majority of this state's native timber resources.

In the last ten years, domestic consumption of hardwood timber products has grown rapidly, yet this demand has largely been met by tropical hardwood imports.

Private native forestry (PNF or farm forestry) has the potential to play a much greater role in meeting domestic timber demand, thus delivering significant benefits to NSW farmers and the state.

PNF involves the selective harvesting of timber on private land. It is a part of normal agricultural activities, not a land clearing activity. Alongside other crops, PNF gives landholders the option of generating farm income from their forests by meeting the growing demand for hardwood products.

Few farmers today have the necessary expertise to manage their forests sustainably on a commercial basis. Currently, farmers seeking to achieve both forestry and biodiversity conservation outcomes are unable to access the support they need.

*The history of agriculture and forestry in Australia has mitigated against the development of a strong farm forestry culture. While successful farmers are skilled in agricultural practices and management, few farmers have the necessary knowledge and skills to sustainably manage their forests and woodlands to produce commercial products.* (Parsons, 1999)

## ONE GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK FOR ALL AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES

PNF is regulated under the *Native Vegetation Act 2003*. This *Act* is currently the subject of a government review, as it does not provide a workable framework for private landholders. Problems arise from the inappropriate classification of PNF as a 'clearing activity' and the harsher approval process to which PNF then becomes subject.

Before private timber can be harvested, landholders must develop and obtain approval for a property vegetation plan (PVP) from the NSW Environmental Protection Authority (EPA). PVP approval can sometimes take years and only allows timber harvesting to occur where environmental values can be 'maintained or improved'. All approved PNF activities are subject to operating conditions set out in *PNF Codes of Practice*. The *Codes* are extremely detailed, overly complex, unduly prescriptive and restrictive on other traditional primary production activities.

The scope and complexity of these approvals and conditions have no equivalent in other agricultural activities. This means that farmers are subject to vastly different regulatory standards according to the type of crop they wish to grow.

PNF is also treated differently when it comes to seeking advice on best farming practice. Under current government service arrangements NSW farmers can readily obtain professional advice from Local Land Services (LLS) on issues relating to cropping, grazing and forest reservation, but not on PNF. Within LLS there is no dedicated forestry expertise, so long as the NSW EPA is the PNF approver and compliance regulator.

Despite the fact that forests on private land make up the bulk of the state's forests that are suitable for timber production, many market opportunities have been lost as farmers, deterred by an onerous and unwelcoming PNF governance system, have simply disengaged.

Biodiversity conservation is an essential consideration in the regulation of PNF activities, yet under the current legislative review PNF is being left out of the planning process. Without the *PNF Codes of Practice* being incorporated into the design of a new *Biodiversity Conservation Act*, the outcome for both biodiversity conservation and timber production will be compromised.

*The 2003 NSW private native forest legislation treats broadscale clearing of extensive areas (deforestation), selective harvesting of individual trees, and other silvicultural activities (timber stand improvement) equally, even though the scale and consequences of these operations are very different.* (Vanclay, 2007)

## PROGRAMS THAT BACK FARM FORESTRY

Farm forestry is a long term business, where native trees grown for timber can take 80 years to reach harvestable age.

Enduring, supportive policy and regulatory frameworks are a prerequisite for programs which promote sustainable forest management and best practice silviculture.

The scientific literature highlights that NSW private native forests are in very poor condition, having been subject to many decades of silvicultural neglect.

The poor state of the forests is directly impeding efforts to promote sustainable timber supply and biodiversity conservation.

Farmers need to be incentivised to engage in active forest management as well as given greater opportunity to acquire necessary knowledge and skills.

Improving the condition of private native forests will only occur with the right support programs.

This means a more supportive operating environment, with improved access to training programs.

Important training subjects include:

- multiple-use forest management
- silviculture
- timber marketing
- pests and weed control
- using fire and ecological thinning to promote forest health.

Design of such programs can occur in such a way that PNF and biodiversity conservation are jointly promoted.

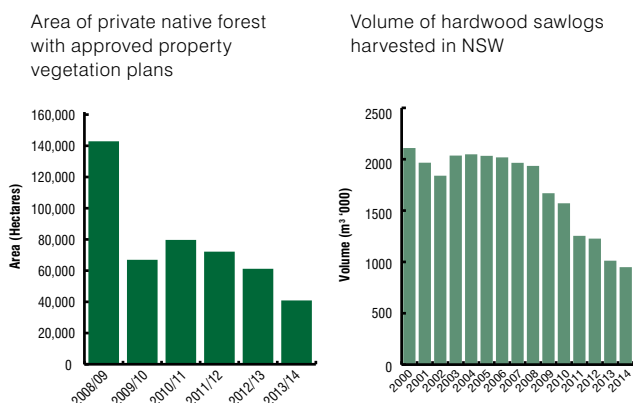
*The results of this study indicate that ‘high grading’ continues to occur in the PNF dry Blackbutt estate. Less than one third of trees in the estate were suitable as sawlogs. This dropped to 26 per cent of sites harvested since the introduction of the Code. Data suggested that trees with vigorous crowns were being harvested, and that Blackbutt trees in particular are being selected for removal. Together these changes indicated the gradual erosion of wood supply value.* (Killey, 2013)

## AUSTRALIAN TIMBER FOR AUSTRALIAN MARKETS

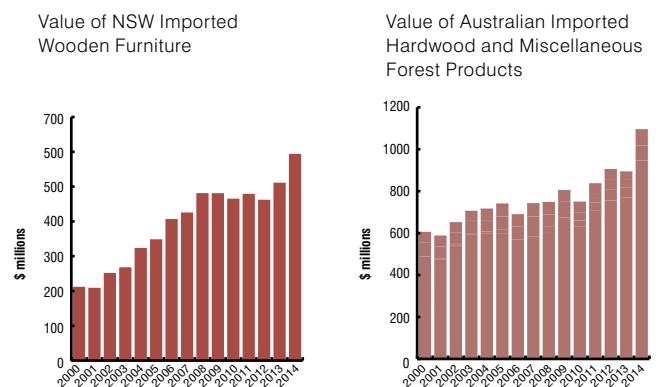
Ideally, NSW farmers would respond to the strong local demand for native timber with robust farm forestry output.

In fact, the decline of PNF under the *Native Vegetation Act* (Figure 1) has been accompanied by a commensurate rise in the importation of hardwood timber (Figure 2), much of it from South East Asian markets which have little or no environmental regulation.

**Figure 1**  
**The decline of private native forestry in NSW**  
(Source: NSW EPA and ABARES)



**Figure 2**  
**The rise of imported hardwood timber**  
(Source: ABARES)



## A BETTER WAY

Farmers need a 'one-stop shop' when it comes to guidance on forestry and their native land-use options.

The current review of native vegetation laws in New South Wales provides an ideal opportunity to implement a more coherent framework.

Under a future model, PNF should be governed as an agricultural activity, by the NSW Department of Primary Industries, the agency responsible for ensuring the sustainable use of natural resources. This should be done by re-establishing a PNF unit administered through Local Land Services.

These entities can support farm forestry to deliver environmental, social and economic outcomes more effectively than the NSW EPA.

One of the recommendations of the Independent Biodiversity Review Panel, as endorsed by the NSW Government, NSW Farmers Association and Timber NSW is that PNF be considered in a separate review process.

As key stakeholders in PNF, the timber industry along with farmers and landowners welcome this development.

### REFERENCES

1. Parsons, M. (1999) Native Forests on Farms. Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation, Publication No. 99/21, Barton, ACT, 47 pp.
2. Vanclay, J.P. (2007) How to foster good husbandry of private native forests. *Small-Scale Forestry* 6, 205–218. doi:10.1007/s11842-007-9010-6
3. Killey, P (2013) The Private Native Forestry Code Outcomes Monitoring Project. 138pp.

## THE TIMBER INDUSTRY SEEKS A PNF GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK THAT:

- **Governs PNF as an agricultural activity through the NSW Department of Primary Industries, by re-establishing a PNF unit administered through Local Land Services**
- **Removes all reference to PNF as a land clearing activity (as proposed by the Independent Panel)**
- **Integrates PNF Codes of Practice with other allowable code-based activities identified under a new *Biodiversity Conservation Act***
- **Better recognises the timber values of private native forests in government planning processes, including the development of a new native vegetation regulatory map**
- **Provides the stability and planning required for the long term, cyclical nature of native forestry**
- **Provides enduring encouragement and support for sustainable PNF through extension services and programs which are aligned with the state's growing domestic demand for hardwood timber products**
- **Commits to making existing PNF Codes of Practice less onerous, in line with PNF not being a clearing activity, and more user friendly.**



**TIMBER NSW**

### ABOUT TIMBER NSW

Timber NSW was established in 1906 as the representative organisation of the timber and forest products industry in New South Wales.

Our mission is to work with our members, stakeholders and the broader industry to build an economically, environmentally and socially sustainable timber industry in New South Wales.

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