



THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY

NATIONAL FOREST & WOODLAND POLICY

PRINCIPLES

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PREAMBLE	2
1 DEFINITIONS	2
1A FOREST AND WOODLAND	2
1B TIMBER COMMODITIES	2
1C PLANTATIONS	3
2 OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES:	3
2A THE PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE	3
2B INTERGENERATIONAL EQUITY	3
2C WILDCOUNTRY PRINCIPLES	3
2D EARTH CHARTER	4
3 CONSERVATION	5
3A PUBLIC LAND RESERVES	5
3B PRIVATE LAND CONSERVATION	6
4 FOREST RESTORATION	6
5 FOREST LAND MANAGEMENT	7
5A LAND CLEARING	7
5B FORESTRY	7
5c Mining	7
6 PLANTATION MANAGEMENT AND ESTABLISHMENT	8
7 FOREST CERTIFICATION	8
8 FORESTS AND CLIMATE	9
9 PEACEFUL PROTEST	10
10 WORKING WITH INDUSTRY	10
11 INDIGENOUS ISSUES	11
REFERENCES:	12

The Wilderness Society

National Forest & Woodland Policy Principles

Preamble

This document provides a broad set of national forest policy principles that underpin specific proposals prepared by National and State Based Campaign teams to meet the broad purpose of The Wilderness Society:

‘To protect, promote and restore wilderness and natural processes across Australia for the survival and ongoing evolution of life on Earth’

Our aspiration for Australia’s Forest and Woodlands:

‘The forest and woodlands of Australia should be maintained and/or restored with their full complement of native species and ecosystems in their natural patterns of distribution and abundance where necessary to achieve The Wilderness Society’s purpose.’

1 Definitions

Forests have been variously defined in Australia since the 1970’s and these definitions have broadened over time to encompass more and more of the continent’s perennial woody vegetation¹. Plantations and timber commodities have been separately defined below.

1a Forest and woodland

All of the definitions have validity for the context in which they were written. The Wilderness Society accepts a broadened structural definition of native forest written for National Forest Inventory.

‘. . . an area, incorporating all living and non-living components, that is dominated by trees having usually a single stem and a mature or potentially mature stand height exceeding 2 metres and with existing or potential crown cover of over-storey strata about equal to or greater than 10 per cent. This definition includes Australia’s diverse native forests regardless of age. It is also sufficiently broad to encompass areas of trees that are sometimes described as woodlands.’²

The Wilderness Society has removed plantations from this definition and expanded the woodland class by dropping the canopy cover percentage to 10%. The Wilderness Society accepts the biological definition of native forest written for the National Forest Policy Statement³.

1b Timber Commodities

Timber commodities are usually considered to be solid wood or composite materials (eg chip board or medium density fibre board, with or without timber veneers) used to produce the following: formwork, floor bearers, floor joists, floor boards, wall frames, roof frames, ceiling frames, roof and

other structural trusses, architraves and skirtings, fascia boards, internal linings, internal doors, internal joinery, external cladding, window frames, pergolas, decks, external joinery, veranda posts and beams, external doors and fencing, wharves and jetties, pallets, bridges, poles, piles and sleepers. This list is not necessarily exhaustive.

Fine furniture timbers, boat-building timbers and craft-wood are not considered to be timber commodities for the purpose of this policy.

1c Plantations

Plantations are defined in the National Forest Policy Statement³. “Intensively managed stands of trees of either native species or exotic species, created by the regular placement of seedlings or seed.

2 Overarching Principles:

The Wilderness Society subscribes to a set of overarching principles that underpin this and other policies. These principles are set out in summary or in full below.

2a The Precautionary Principle

“In order to protect the environment, the precautionary approach shall be widely applied by States according to their capabilities. When there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation”⁴

2b Intergenerational Equity

“Sustainable development seeks to meet the needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the ability to meet those of the future.”⁵

2c WildCountry Principles⁶

WildCountry Scientific Principles

The WildCountry scientific framework is founded on the premise that the conservation of biodiversity and related natural heritage values demands a landscape-wide approach to conservation that recognises the importance of *ecological connectivity* at continental and regional scales.

The processes that sustain and regenerate ecological systems operate across a range of time scales and spatial scales. Many, if not most, work at spatial and time scales that far exceed those at which humans perceive, use and manage land and natural resources. Thus, many important ecological processes involve connections at scales not considered by conventional conservation planning and management.

Protection of Australia’s biodiversity into the long term is therefore more probable through conservation based on a multi-scaled, landscape and process based framework.

Three key concepts are potentially relevant to the WildCountry scientific framework, namely:

- (1) continental and regional connectivity of *large core areas* is required to support the long-term conservation requirements of spatially extensive ecological processes;
- (2) *complementary land management* in surrounding landscapes; and,
- (3) where necessary, *restoration of natural processes* and disturbance regimes, the control of invasive species, and the reintroduction of native species.

Seven processes of ecological connectivity relevant to WildCountry have been identified:

1. Strongly interactive species

top-down regulation; role of predators in ecosystem structure.

2. Hydro-ecology

dependencies between vegetation, water and animal habitat; e.g. refugia.

3. Long distance biological movement

especially for migrants and dispersive/nomadic species.

4. Fire regimes

understanding fire as an ecological management tool.

5. Climate change and variability

impacts on species distributions/habitat, and ecosystem dynamics.

6. Land / coastal zone fluxes

e.g., catchments transporting water and nutrients from inland to coastal ecosystems.

7. Long-term, spatially-extensive evolutionary processes

Because speciation often involves range expansion followed by isolation and differentiation, this evolutionary process is usually dependent on habitat continuity and movement over relatively long distances.

2d Earth Charter

The preamble to the Earth Charter is set out below and the full document can be found at:
<http://www.earthcharter.org/files/charter/charter.pdf>

PREAMBLE

We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.

Earth, Our Home

Humanity is part of a vast evolving universe. Earth, our home, is alive with a unique community of life. The forces of nature make existence a demanding and uncertain adventure, but Earth has provided the conditions essential to life's evolution. The resilience of the community of life and the well-being of humanity depend upon preserving a healthy biosphere with all its ecological systems, a rich variety of plants and animals, fertile soils, pure waters, and clean air. The global environment with its finite resources is a common concern of all peoples. The protection of Earth's vitality, diversity, and beauty is a sacred trust.

The Global Situation

The dominant patterns of production and consumption are causing environmental devastation, the depletion of resources, and a massive extinction of species. Communities are being undermined. The benefits of development are not shared equitably and the gap between rich and poor is widening. Injustice, poverty, ignorance, and violent conflict are widespread and the cause of great suffering. An unprecedented rise in human population has overburdened ecological and social systems. The foundations of global security are threatened. These trends are perilous—but not inevitable.

The Challenges Ahead

The choice is ours: form a global partnership to care for Earth and one another or risk the destruction of ourselves and the diversity of life. Fundamental changes are needed in our values, institutions, and ways of living. We must realize that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more. We have the knowledge and technology to provide for all and to reduce our impacts on the environment. The emergence of a global civil society is creating new opportunities to build a democratic and humane world. Our environmental, economic, political, social, and spiritual challenges are interconnected, and together we can forge inclusive solutions.

Universal Responsibility

To realize these aspirations, we must decide to live with a sense of universal responsibility, identifying ourselves with the whole Earth community as well as our local communities. We are at once citizens of different nations and of one world in which the local and global are linked. Everyone shares responsibility for the present and future well-being of the human family and the larger living world. The spirit of human solidarity and kinship with all life is strengthened when we live with reverence for the mystery of being, gratitude for the gift of life, and humility regarding the human place in nature.

3 Conservation

The Wilderness Society recognises that meeting long-term conservation objectives for Australia's forests requires a reservation network on public land and conservation management arrangements on private and leasehold land.

3a Public Land Reserves

The Wilderness Society will help develop proposals for and campaign to have implemented a comprehensive (and where possible connected) forest reserve network across the continent. This has to be capable of being maintained into the future in order to secure the full range of ecosystem

services that these forests provide. These forests should be in National Parks and other secure reserves. The Wilderness Society is preparing a reserve management policy.

The Wilderness Society recognises that a priority for reservation should be given to forest ecosystems that have one or more of the following characteristics:

- Satisfy the WildCountry Science Principles
- rare, threatened or endangered, or contain centres of endemism;
- old-growth;
- forested wilderness;
- Rainforest (including with emergent eucalypts);
- undisturbed / negligibly disturbed mature forests;
- highly (biologically) productive;
- have been identified as core habitats for local endemic, rare, threatened and endangered species;
- have been identified as having world heritage or of national heritage value;
- are located in areas with steep climate gradients;
- or form part of domestic supply or Wild River catchments.;
- refugia and/or of evolutionary significance;
- are significant carbon stores and;
- areas of high cultural and social significance.

These are the High Conservation Value (HCV) forests.

3b Private land conservation

The Wilderness Society recognises that in order to secure long-term conservation objectives a range of measures need to be implemented with the cooperation of private landowners, governments and environmental non-government organizations. These will include:

Land purchases; private nature conservation reserves, appropriate regulatory measures, conservation covenants, conservation management agreements, incentive packages and voluntary conservation programs like Land for Wildlife.

These measures are needed to help provide connectivity in otherwise fragmented landscapes.

4 Forest Restoration

The Wilderness Society recognises that many of Australian forest landscapes and ecosystems are either significantly fragmented by clearance and or highly disturbed by intensive forest use. In order to maintain ecosystem processes at the regional and landscape scale and or achieve good reserve design outcomes, areas of disturbed and or cleared land will need to be restored.

A suite of tools will need to be used to achieve this outcome. Restoration forestry⁷ ecological revegetation and remnant vegetation protection are all possible tools.

5 Forest Land Management

5a Land clearing

The Wilderness Society is opposed to the broad acre clearing of native forest for any purposes. Despite the undertaking's given by all State Premiers and the Commonwealth in the National Forest Policy Statement and other bilateral agreements with the Commonwealth, forests are still being cleared although this is closely regulated in most jurisdictions except Tasmania and the Northern Territory where plantation conversion of native forest is still a major driver of land clearance.

5b Forestry

The Wilderness Society does not support the use of native forests to supply woodchips for pulp, wood for power generation, charcoal production, commercial firewood or timber commodities.

The Wilderness Society will support sustainable traditional indigenous use of timber and locally sourced wood for low volume housing needs.

The Wilderness Society does not believe that there is a native forest logging systems in use in Australia that has been proven to be ecologically sustainable, in terms of the full range of ecosystem services provided by forests that are in a natural state, over the natural life cycle of those forest ecosystems.

It is acknowledged that the lower the intensity and frequency of logging events the lower the likely overall impact of the disturbance. On the basis of this understanding The Wilderness Society is prepared to examine proposals to log very small volumes of wood for high value products outside proposed reserves – preferably as part of a transition strategy to rely on purpose planted trees and only if all commodity production from those areas has ceased.

The Wilderness Society recognises that transition strategies are required both to provide wood flows while industry restructures to alternatives from plantations and that areas of heavily logged forest outside of reserves in some cases will require ecological management interventions such as thinning of stands where trees have effectively stopped growing because of competition for water and nutrients (restoration forestry). This would continue to provide significant wood flows in some regions in the short to medium term.

The purpose of any interventions would be to increase the diversity of forest age structures and ecological functionality.

5c Mining

Where the removal of vegetation as part of mining operations is inevitable, TWS will not oppose traditional owners recovering wood.

6 Plantation Management and Establishment

The Wilderness Society believes that all of Australia's pulpwood, commercial firewood and timber commodity production should come from extant plantations of softwood and hardwood and that this would deliver higher rates of return to State Forest agencies than maintaining wood flows from crown native forests⁸.

In many areas of Australia it will not be appropriate to establish plantations until current serious plantation management issues are addressed. Indeed there will be areas of plantations which will need to be restored to as close to native forests as possible.

In other areas plantations can be an important part of ecological restoration processes, including those planted for commodity production.

Current plantation management practices, particularly as they relate to post land-clearing establishment, are unacceptable. A series of concerns in respect of these issues have been a matter of public record since 1990⁹

The Wilderness Society does not support any use, including aerial application, of: the triazine group of chemicals, synthetic pyrethroids, any of the other chemicals with known human or ecological toxic impacts, or 1080 poison baiting for herbivores.

Similar concerns have been raised in respect of the genetic pollution of native forests either as a result of plantation species invading native forest or the more insidious problem of genetic contamination of native gene pools with genetically modified, exotic or non-local provenances of commercial species. These issues need to be recognised in species and site selection for plantings.

Catchment management issues relating to plantation establishment, rotation length and watercourse protection need to be addressed. The Wilderness Society believes that water quantity and quality outcomes must take precedence over wood supply outcomes.

The Wilderness Society will work with the plantation sector to help address all of these sustainability issues.

7 Forest Certification

Forest Certification is a branding exercise that gives timber producers access to markets or very rarely a price premium in the market. The best certification schemes have criteria, which if properly applied can deliver certainty that the management system certified has been delivered. Only one forest certification scheme FSC^{10, 11} (Forest Stewardship Council) currently allows environmental NGO-stakeholders access to the accreditation process. Certification schemes are not a guarantee of environmental outcomes and in many cases merely certify the status quo for legal but very bad forestry practices. The Australian Forestry Standard (AFS) is such a scheme, claiming that it establishes that AFS certified wood comes from sustainably managed forests¹².

The Wilderness Society does not support or recognise the validity of the Australian Forest Standard. There are other brands, which from time to time make environmental claims that either mean nothing or are misleading. The Wilderness Society will publish material in respect of these brands when appropriate¹³.

The Wilderness Society recognises and supports the accreditation of plantations and plantations undergoing restoration that meet the criteria for FSC Certification but not where certified companies have interests in the logging of High Conservation value forests.

This support is not meant to condone bad chemical governance by an accredited company. The Wilderness Society is not making a claim that certification equates to ecological sustainability.

The Wilderness Society encourages those purchasing wood sourced from developing countries to choose FSC labelled products as this provides guarantees as to the legality and intensity of the logging and could help reduce logging pressures in these countries if widely adopted as a purchasing preference.

The Wilderness Society does not believe that there is currently any native forest logging systems in Australia that could be legitimately environmentally branded. Wood taken from native forest restoration and or low intensity forestry (see 5b above) might be appropriate for accreditation once regional high conservation value forest reservation outcomes have been met.

8 Forests and Climate¹

Deforestation (landclearing) accounts for at least 18% of current global CO₂ emissions. Forest degradation (logging and burning) is also a major contributor. Avoiding deforestation and forest degradation will be crucial if we are to prevent dangerous climate change (i.e. avert more than a two degrees Celcius rise in average global temperatures).

Australia contains some of the most carbon dense forest and woodland ecosystems in the world. Logging and land clearing in Australia contribute substantially to our national emissions of CO₂.²

The Wilderness Society endorses the need for Australia to have an agreed long term binding target for the reduction of all greenhouse gases. The Wilderness Society in line with most Australian environmental non-government organisations supports emissions reductions of 30% by 2020, rising to a reduction of 80% by 2050 (based on 1990 levels).

There are a number of mechanisms, instruments and policy protocols that would help avoid the worst impacts of climate change. Ratifying the Kyoto Protocol is an important part of a suite of approaches to deal with this urgent problem.

The Wilderness Society supports initiatives³ to purchase legal forestry use rights for conversion to legal carbon sequestration rights on public and private land. These initiatives could operate independently of any mandatory emissions trading schemes.⁴ Initiatives should be based on a robust set of principles and criteria; and have robust governance structures that are open, transparent and participatory. Measurement and/or estimates of stored carbon need to be scientifically rigorous.

Short rotation pulp plantations grown on cleared agricultural land offer very limited opportunities to sequester carbon unless management practices are significantly changed to retain carbon *in situ* at

¹ TWS is developing a stand alone policy on Climate Change and Native Vegetation.

² See “*Trees the Forgotten Solution to Climate Change*” for updated figures on Australian logging and land clearing contribution to avoidable carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions.

³ The necessary legal and accounting architecture needs to be established in Australia to enable such forest protection initiatives to be undertaken systematically.

⁴ Such “voluntary” initiatives can serve as pilot projects providing important learnings that could apply to their eventual inclusion in emissions trading schemes as the carbon market matures.

harvesting. As the net contribution to CO₂ reduction over the cropping period is low, they should not form part of any emissions trading scheme developed for Australia.

The Wilderness Society (in line with forest definitions established under the Kyoto protocol) recognises that plantations established on native forest sites cleared post-1990 are net sources of very significant emissions and should never be eligible to receive carbon credits in any emissions trading schemes.

Under no circumstances should forest products, e.g. sawntimber, be credited as stored carbon in emissions trading schemes. Such an approach does not account for the emissions resulting from the logging operation which produced the wood product. Such partial accounting can create perverse incentives to log that result in greater carbon emissions and a worse climate outcome.

The purchase of clearing permits in Australia for carbon credits⁵ has established a model which demonstrates the economic feasibility and validity of converting one land use right to another. In Australia, the opportunities for both biodiversity protection and climate mitigation from converting destructive land-use options into rights to sequester carbon are enormous.

As well as the obvious ecological benefits there may be significant opportunities for carbon sequestration in broad scale landscape restoration. The economic opportunities, landscapes involved and timescales associated with the purchase of carbon rights of these types of projects will be closely examined as appropriate.

In particular, Indigenous Australians who own or hold rights over millions of hectares of forests and woodlands around Australia, and who are under increasing pressure to approve the clearing of those forests and woodlands, should receive economic benefits from the protection of those forests and woodlands and their carbon and biodiversity values.

9 Peaceful Protests

The Wilderness Society asserts its right to protest to highlight the plight of threatened forests and or the bad environmental behaviours of industry and government.

10 Working with Industry

The Wilderness Society welcomes any opportunity to work with the logging industry and users of wood commodities to achieve agreed conservation and industry goals. The Wilderness Society strongly supports transitional industry change that helps secure critical conservation objectives and a long-term competitive future for the wood and wood products sector.

When unable to work with industry, The Wilderness Society will promote solutions based on creating industry development opportunities that provide strong social, environmental and economic benefits.

⁵ In 2006, Rio Tinto purchased the clearing permits for 13,000 hectares of forest and woodland in Queensland, for carbon credits which were accredited by the Australian Greenhouse Office's Greenhouse Friendly Program.

11 Indigenous Issues

The Wilderness Society has an indigenous policy¹⁴. This will be applied where appropriate in relation to this policy.

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