

By Harriett Swift on Agenda items 13.1 and/or 13.2

I want to focus on how native forest logging lost its social licence and why.

Some years ago I was looking for results of opinion polls on native forest logging. It was REALLY hard to find them. Eventually, I contacted one of the national pollsters. He told me: well, none of us do them much any more because everyone knows what the answer will be: it's always a resounding 'no.'

But we do still find occasional polls commissioned by various bodies. One of those is worth a closer look; it was a major survey commissioned by the national forestry body, Forest and Wood Products Australia (FWPA) and undertaken by Canberra University academics.

Of more than 13,000 people in all States and territories, 70% in urban and 65% in rural areas found native forest logging "unacceptable."

Forest and Wood Products Australia was so embarrassed by the findings that they never released it. They still haven't. We only got to hear about when it was leaked.

According to the Ethics Centre "social license" requires legitimacy, trust and credibility. I'll quickly run through a few of the reasons why native forest logging fails on all three.

Economics: without massive subsidies it would have ended years ago. Forestry Corp regularly reports multi-million dollar trading losses, - born by the taxpayers.

Climate: it's a huge carbon emitter. The nonsense we still hear about logging being carbon positive from carbon stored in durable timber products - and we'll hear it again today - just doesn't add up. Even if durable timber products did work that magic, remember - we are talking about export woodchips here. Within 2 or 3 years, it's all CO₂. And the new product from the chipmill, briquettes has an even shorter shelf life. They become almost instant carbon dioxide.

Bushfires: This region has become an exemplar of the scientific research finding that logging increases the risk and intensity of bushfires. Young regrowth forest is even aged, even height, denser and drier - tinder for the next bushfires waiting to happen.

Biodiversity: In the early years of woodchipping a licence to log was - literally- a licence to kill wildlife. The earliest ecological work was done by counting the dead bodies of the animals at the end of each day's work. Wildlife are territorial. Even if they survive the destruction of their homes, they can't just move next door.

Buildings materials: native forest logging here is driven by export woodchipping and virtually all construction is from plantation softwood.

Jobs: Just over half of one percent of all jobs in the BVS are in logging. That's fewer jobs than there are in the arts and recreation. Employment has steadily declined as the machines get bigger. It hasn't quite happened in Australia yet, but every job in the logging industry can now be done by a robot, and soon will be if the industry survives long enough.

(Finally) Tourism: the mayor's motion 13.1 mentions tourism as one of the benefits. Is he serious? There's a thing known as "doomsday tourism" whereby visitors flock to places such as the Arctic, specifically to see endangered, fragile environments before they're gone. Perhaps there's scope for some doomsday tourism here with a bit more planning and a bit more logging.

In the Black Summer bushfires 80% of forest available on the south coast was burnt. Most has still not recovered. The last thing the forests need now – whether they are publicly or privately owned is more logging.

At a time when other States and countries are ending native forest logging, we should stopping it, not increasing it.

Rejecting this proposal would not just be the right thing to do, it would also have strong public support.