



MEDIA STATEMENT

The South West forests are worth more than firewood

29th April 2022

The State Government has committed to banning the logging of native forests from 2024. Now is the time to consider cleaner, more sustainable heating from renewable energy sources.

In response to industry-backed warnings about a shortage of firewood, Jess Beckerling from the WA Forest Alliance says that forests are more valuable standing. Not only are they vital as carbon storage, but burning them for fuel adds to our record-high level of carbon emissions. In this time of climate crisis, industry needs to adapt to the new era of forest management instead of resorting to scare tactics. We are all stakeholders in a more sustainable future.

In the ABC article *Firewood shortage flagged for South-west WA*, logging lobbyist John Clarke criticised the ban on native forest harvesting for causing a slump in the amount of native timber available for firewood. He warned WA households that supply could run short.

However, we have other options for heating but a finite amount of remnant forest. Each year, West Australians burn approximately 150 000 tonnes of Jarrah for firewood. A further 150 000 - 250 000 tonnes is burned by Simcoa in the silicon refining process.

Jess Beckerling points out that this is a vast quantity when you consider the already extreme history of logging and clearing in WA: 'We've lost 90% of the original native vegetation cover in the South West and what we have left is critically important for climate and biodiversity. Over the past few decades, 85% of all the Jarrah sold from native forest logging and clearing has gone to firewood, charcoal and mill waste - the waste has been absolutely staggering.'

The current statistics on the quantities of wood burned for fuel are unsustainable. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has recently named the Northern Jarrah Forest region as an ecosystem at particular risk of collapse due to the onset of hotter, drier conditions. The State Government's ban on native forests logging has been a long time coming and is a critical step in our efforts to preserve the biodiversity and ecological values of our forests for the future.

This does not mean that households have to go cold. Instead, we can view the ban on logging native forests as an opportunity to find alternative, more sustainable options for heating.

“We need to look at the bigger picture and value the incredible forests we have. What’s left of the forests is worth more standing than as firewood. We can still have a fire, but we have to need to be thoughtful about where the wood is coming from,” Jess Beckerling said.

Plantation timber is already part of the Government’s plan to transition out of native forests. Tasmanian bluegum is one such timber: it burns hot, makes few sparks and produces good coals. There will also be a smaller but continuing supply of timber produced by the ongoing clearing particularly by the mining industry and from a proposed thinning program being developed.

“While the upcoming end of native forest logging is a huge step forward in the protection of the remaining South West forests, cutting down and clearing hasn’t come to a complete end. There is still the major issue of mining in the forests, including Alcoa and South32’s proposed expansions of bauxite mining into the Northern Jarrah Forests.

“The WA community has made it crystal clear that we value forests standing. They are worth more for climate, biodiversity, water and communities standing than they are as firewood and other waste products.

Households might also consider switching to electric heating and Wafa endorses Government support for people wanting to install solar powered household heating. Wood burning releases carbon into the atmosphere and contributes to air pollution. In March this year, City of Nedlands voted to pursue a ban on wood-burning heaters and were hoping the Minister for Environment would support a rebate package for their replacement with cleaner alternatives.

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