

Business...

Install a Timber Floor – Save a Forest!



Randy Flierman, ATFA CEO.

I don't want to scare you; however, we are at grave risk of losing our prized flooring resource – Australian native species – due to the decisions made by governments. The concern is real, and in late May 2023, a decision by the Victorian Government to end all native forest harvesting was made and will take effect from 1 January 2024.



Fundamentally, NSW forests are the largest source of supply for timber flooring and other hardwood products into the East Coast of Australia. While Queensland and Tasmania still have active and substantial harvesting operations; in recent times we have also seen WA stop all native harvesting. Tasmania too was somewhat reduced before the situation was partially reversed. South Australia, the ACT and New Zealand all haven't had active native harvesting for quite some time. In the lead-up to the NSW 2023 election, many announcements were made in respect to NSW forests, raising alarm bells for the industry.

In May 2023, the ATFA Board of Directors undertook a NSW forest and mill visit (with considerable thanks to the great folk at Pentarch Forestry and the wonderful guys from the NSW Forestry Corporation who provided considerable insight to forestry practices). It became abundantly clear that we're not doing enough to support where our fundamental product comes from.

There were many key messages from this visit; here are the facts:

- NSW has 20 million hectares of forest.
- 2 million hectares of this are State Forests, of which only 30 thousand hectares are harvested each year.
- And when we say harvested, we mean selectively and sensitively:
 - Scrub turpentine are protected, cordoned off and not touched, as well as other protected species.
 - Nectar trees for glossy black cockatoos and nesting zones for swift parrots are protected.
 - Trees designated as koala trees are protected, as are habitats for other wildlife such as bats and potoroos.
 - Seed trees are identified and protected; these serve to regenerate the area after harvest, leaving the forest healthier than it was before.
 - Habitat trees are protected, including hollowed out trees and others that have ecological benefits.
 - Riparian zones are widely buffered.

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- Aboriginal cultural sites are off limits.
- Existing tracks and working pads used from decades past (from the bullocking days, over 100 years ago) are systematically reused rather than new tracks cut.
- Finally, a minimum of 10 healthy trees (in addition to all the regrowth) are left per hectare.
- The trees are targeted to be removed at around the 60-year-old mark – this is where their growth rate begins to decline, and they become more of a barrier to further forest growth than they help. This slowdown in growth also means the carbon-capturing of the tree declines. By removing these aged trees, canopy space opens up; and accelerated growth in that localised area leads to bigger, healthier trees that can capture more carbon and keep the forest healthy. This process has been conducted successfully for over 100 years in the area we visited, and the forest has never been in better shape than it is now.
- Without this careful management, the forest potentially becomes unhealthy, competing for canopy, prone to insect infestation and less fire-resistant due to uncontrolled vegetation and dry matter.
- And how is all that harvest management undertaken? Forestry Corporation are all about growing the forest; their teams of silviculture specialists are walking the forest floor every day identifying all the items listed above and documenting this all down to the metre; marking on an electronic map each protected tree and habitat area. These teams are walking, on average, 8kms per day for months prior to any logging works taking place. No stone is left unturned in this process.




There is much to do to spread what is fundamentally a positive message. The industry is leaving such a light touch on the environment in such a small amount of the forest. ATFA is embarking on a program to spread this positive message – as the future of all our members can, or will be impacted in some way if we don't start now.

Sustainable and sensitive harvesting as witnessed in NSW is improving the forest; therefore, installing a timber floor is helping to protect our wonderful resource!

Timber is recognised as the leading renewable construction material, which when used helps to reduce the carbon footprint of buildings.

More information can be found at these links:

- <https://www.forestrycorporation.com.au/>
- <https://fwca.org.au/>
- <https://www.woodsolutions.com.au/> 



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