

Private Forestry Guidance Materials

Information Sheet 14: North East NSW Forestry Hub

About the Hub

The North East NSW Hub is one of 11 similar organisations funded by the Australian Government to provide it with advice on supporting growth in the forest and wood products sector in key regions. North East NSW is abundant in forests, with about two-thirds of its land supporting tree cover. The region benefits from high rainfall, productive soil and a long growing season, making it highly suitable for cultivating tall timber trees in both regrowth native forest and plantation settings. The Hub spans from the Queensland border in the north to the Hawkesbury River in the south, encompassing the cities of Newcastle, Armidale, Coffs Harbour, and Lismore. The predominant forest type is native eucalypt, with more than six million hectares of native forest, of which about 800,000 ha is designated for wood production. There are 54,000 ha of hardwood plantations and 26,000 ha of softwood plantations.

About the industry

The North East NSW region boasts a significant hardwood industry, contributing \$700 million annually to GDP and providing 5,700 jobs. This thriving industry produces a wide range of hardwood products, including flooring, decking, cladding, joinery, structural hardwood, engineered products, poles, marine piles, pallets, fencing timber, mining timber and bioenergy. Most of the hardwood timber is sourced from native regrowth forests on both public and private land, with a small volume of hardwood sawlogs grown in plantations owned by Forestry Corporation NSW.

Softwood plantations are split between the northern tablelands (radiata pine) between Walcha and Tamworth and coastal plains (southern pines) between Grafton and Casino. Radiata pine is grown almost exclusively on public land (State forests) while ownership of southern pine plantations is split between public and private.

Employment opportunities in the Hub predominantly centre around wood processing mills, with about 50 mills throughout the region. Most of these mills are in the Clarence Valley, Mid-Coast, Port Macquarie-Hastings and Coffs Harbour areas, with some significant employers operating on the outskirts of these main areas. The 2019 bushfires had a significant impact on the softwood estate, which will take some time to recover.



Figure 1: The North East NSW Forestry Hub location.

The forest estate

Native forests and hardwood plantations

The approximately 800,000 ha of commercially available native forests in the region produce about 850,000 tonnes of hardwood logs, sourced from native regrowth forests and hardwood plantations, with about 70% from publicly owned State forests and the balance from private property. Many of the region's regrowth forests have been working forests for more than 150 years, being sustainably managed for timber and other values.

ABARES forecasts long-term hardwood plantation log production at around 350,000 m³/yr, peaking at about 450,000 m³/yr between 2040 and 2045, with a significant increase in the proportion of potential sawlog.

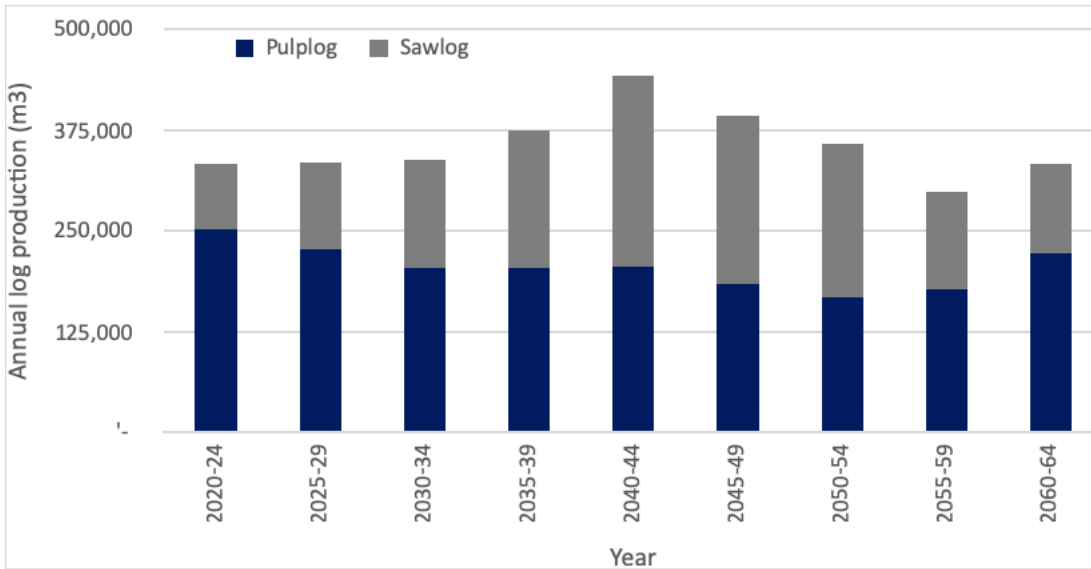


Figure 2: Forecast annual hardwood plantation log production levels in five year bands (ABARES, 2021)

Softwood plantations

As a result of the 2019 bushfires, softwood plantation log production is expected to decline substantially from 2025 through to 2045, as plantations are re-established and grow to maturity.

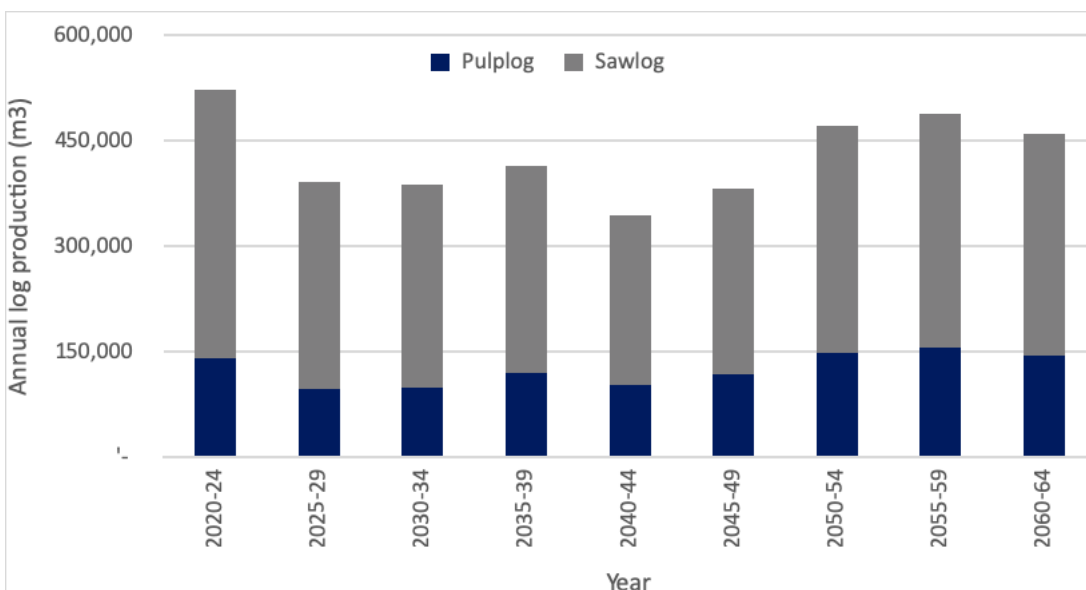


Figure 3: Forecast annual softwood plantation log production in five year bands (ABARES, 2021)

Markets, products and supply chain

The region's well-established timber industry services a growing national demand for wood, with more than 50 processing facilities. However, softwood timber processing mostly occurs in larger mills outside the region, with logs being transported by both road and rail.

The hardwood species grown in native forests and plantations in northern NSW are highly prized for their appearance, durability, strength and other characteristics. Up to 40 sawmills process about 50 different eucalypt species, although supply is dominated by a smaller number of preferred and available species including blackbutt, spotted gum, tallowwood, Sydney blue gum, brush box, and ironbarks which make up more than two-thirds of the log mix.

The most commonly produced items are flooring and decking, although the highest-value hardwoods are used for utility poles and girders for bridges and wharves, while many sawmills also produce high-value timber for furniture, as well as timber for mining, railways and landscaping.

Timber processing generates by-products such as firewood and sawdust for biomass energy or agriculture. Forest residues may also be processed into firewood or exported to the pulp market in Brisbane. Most of the processed timber is sold through timber merchants to customers in Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne.

Opportunities for independent growers

There is a thriving private native forestry industry in north-eastern NSW and a supportive regulatory environment that which maintains resources for growers. There are important opportunities for private plantation growers who are interested in diversifying their land use opportunities.

Managing forests

Private native forests

A **Private Native Forestry Plan** is required that must be approved by the NSW Government Local Land Services. An approved PNF Plan is a legally binding agreement and identifies the relevant Private Native Forestry Code of Practice and the need to complete a Forest Management Plan before any operations commence. The four **Private Native Forestry Codes of Practice** that apply in NSW are:

- Northern NSW
- Southern NSW
- River red gum forests
- Cypress and western hardwood forests.

A development consent may also be required in some local government areas, so it is necessary to investigate any additional obligations before commencing forestry operations.

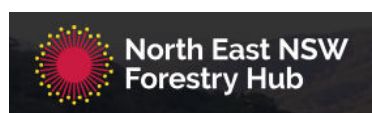
Plantations

Planning, approval and regulation of private plantations falls under the ***Plantations and Reafforestation Act (1999)*** and the ***Plantations and Reafforestation Regulation (2001)***, administered by the Department of Primary Industries. The Regulation is in the form of a Code of Practice. These instruments were introduced to streamline the approvals and regulatory processes for plantations. Plantations must be assessed by an authorised person (Department officer) following an application for an authorised plantation. Plantations under 30 ha are exempt.

More information

North East NSW Forestry Hub

<https://nenswforestryhub.com.au>



Australian Government
Department of Agriculture,
Fisheries and Forestry