

APRIL 2021

CALL FOR QUEENSLAND NATIVE HARDWOOD LOG EXPORT SUSPENSION AND REGULATORY CRACKDOWN

Issue

Over the past four years there has been a marked rise in containerised native hardwood log exports from Queensland (over 360,000 cubic metres), with widespread reports and incidents of poor forestry practices and breaches of state and federal environmental regulation from opportunistic log traders. These exports have predominately been to China and other Asian markets and are sourced largely from private native forests and woodlands.

Timber Queensland has consistently made representation to the Australian and Queensland Governments about the lack of a reasonable and systematic regulatory compliance monitoring and auditing regime for native log export licence requirements.

Eroding long-term hardwood resources: the equivalent volume of two years private supply for local industry was exported between 2017 and 2020

Impacting 2000 rural and regional hardwood industry related jobs and reducing availability of high-quality and appearance timber for QLD's building and construction industry

Fly by night operators, flagrantly abusing the rules cannot be tolerated from an industry perspective and should not be tolerated by Governments

Why is this a problem?

Queensland's hardwood timber industry is concerned about the adverse environmental, economic and social impacts from the unprecedented level of native log exports and lack of regulatory compliance monitoring. These concerns include:

- opportunistic export operators not acting in the long-term interests of landowners or the industry;
- anecdotal observations of yards and log truck volumes destined to ports well above the ABS export statistics for hardwood log exports;
- customs reports of poor biosecurity practices of native log consignments to China;
- breaches of state and federal environmental regulation, in contravention of the requirements of a federal log export licence;
- risks of unsafe work practices;
- high prices paid for export logs, suggesting potential market distortions or cost savings through non-compliance;
- abnormal commercial practices bordering on suspected criminal behaviour;
- lack of compliance auditing and coordination by the Australian and State Governments;
- the negative social licence implications for industry as a whole; and
- landowners not being paid or timber resources being left to waste (i.e. not being fully utilised).

A way forward

Timber Queensland is calling for a suspension of hardwood native log exports from the state to address these concerns and risks to long-term Ecologically Sustainable Forest Management. This would:



reduce the current risks to the environment from rogue log export operators and brokers, and protect the productivity of private forest resources from poor forest practices until an adequate regime is put in place.



provide a more level playing field with the rest of industry which strictly complies with regulatory requirements for sustainable forest management and domestic processing.



address immediate concerns over non-compliant and in some cases suspected criminal activity.



allow for a review of the shortfalls and risks of the current compliance regime, and the development of an adequate and effective compliance system in the future for licencing log export activities.

A critical failure in the current compliance regime is the lack of coordination & inter-governmental compliance checking and auditing between the Australian and Queensland Governments

New Export Control (Wood and Woodchips) Rules 2020 explicitly state the rules for exporters to comply with state laws and management arrangements, this increases the need for an effective compliance and audit regime to monitor compliance against these conditions and the risks of illegal activities

It will take time and resources to develop appropriate protocols given the need for greater Federal & State Government agreement & coordination on compliance

Immediate action required



Recommend a native hardwood log export suspension for at least two years, which could be reassessed at that time for up to five years.

In parallel there needs to be concrete action that includes:

- a review of the shortfalls and risks of the current compliance regime;
- the development of an adequate and effective compliance system in the future for log export activities, taking into account:
 - the need for greater intergovernmental agreement and coordination on regulatory compliance;
 - adequate recognition of the complexity of regulatory requirements across the two levels of Government and development of appropriate processes and protocols for effective compliance and enforcement action; and
- provision of adequate resources for enforcement within DAWE and related agencies.

Want more information and recommendations? Read Timber Queensland's detailed [native hardwood log export bulletin](#).