Social Values in Forest Management

IFA Forestry Policy Statement 2.12

The Institute of Foresters of Australia (IFA) advocates forest management approaches that are socially sustainable by recognising the social values of forests, promoting positive social benefits and minimising negative impacts. Forest managers need to consider and provide for social values in forest management to improve forestry's role in society.

The Issue

Social values are integral to sustainable forest management: forestry activities are not separate from the community in which they operate. Therefore it is necessary to recognise and respond to the community's social values in forests and to consider how forest management can support these benefits in forests.

Background

In Australian forestry, there are a wide range of social issues and values important to individuals, communities and various groups. These include the cultural and spiritual values of forests (for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups); direct and indirect employment in the forest sector; recreation and tourism; forestry workers' rights; provision of local needs such as firewood, food resources or medicines; and the contribution of forests to the resilience of local communities to changing conditions.

Understanding and managing social values requires a high level of public engagement. Some social issues are typical to most forest types, while others can be specific to a particular forest type, such as native forests or plantations. Some values may be best provided for through policies and management at a national or regional level, while others can be considered individually for each forest.

Forest certification has encouraged forest owners and managers to assess social and environmental aspects of forest management. Both the Australian Forestry Standard (AFS) and the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) schemes include components that address social issues.

Policy

The IFA supports and encourages:

- Organisations involved in forest management to develop and apply clear social objectives that include:
    - Ethically responsible behaviour in relationships with stakeholders
    - Community engagement strategies for forest planning and operations
    - Monitoring of the social and economic impacts of forest management activities.
- Greater efforts to enhance the role of Indigenous people in management of forests, development of forest-based enterprises and employment in forest-based industries (including tourism)
- Ongoing systematic monitoring of the social values of forests by governments and the forest industry
- Continued research into ways of identifying and monitoring social values of forests and for enhancing community engagement with forest management.

The IFA considers that:

- Forests have wide significance, meaning and economic and social benefits for Australian society
- Native forests and forest landscapes have special cultural significance to Indigenous people
- Different types of forest management activities (such as timber production or prescribed burning) in native forests or plantations may have impacts on different social groups or individuals that need to be managed and mitigated.