Pew

September 2025

Submission Response to the Consultation Draft of the Queensland Future Timber Plan 2050.

Tropical rainforest in Lannercost State Forest 2023. Photo: Kerry Trapnell.

The Pew Charitable Trusts

About us

The Pew Charitable Trusts is an evidence-based, non-profit organisation working to protect Australia's unique nature. We are driven by our enduring experience that nature needs people actively managing our lands and coasts to ensure sustainable livelihoods and healthy functioning environments. We work with local communities, stakeholders and governments on science-based solutions that ensure people have what they need to care for Australia's magnificent, life sustaining environments.

We are committed to non-partisan, evidence-based solutions to achieve global targets to protect biodiversity, primarily focussed on protected area growth and management. We have worked with partners to shape conservation outcomes in Queensland for over 15 years.

Our work in Queensland

Queensland is one of the most biodiverse places on Earth and supports globally significant natural and cultural values. Through our work with partner organisations across the tourism, recreation, pastoral, land management and conservation sectors, The Pew Charitable Trusts aims to help permanently protect up to 17% of Queensland in line with the current policy.

For many years The Pew Charitable Trusts has engaged with government and participated in numerous consultation processes to inform the development and delivery of policy to better protect and manage Queensland's natural and living cultural values.

We work with Traditional Owners, local communities, farmers, scientists, recreational users, outdoor industry representatives and government agencies to create new and well-managed protected areas, so we can secure a healthy future for nature and our treasured way of life.

We are committed to non-partisan, evidence-based solutions to achieve global targets to protect biodiversity. We have worked with partners to shape conservation outcomes in Queensland for over 15 years.

Summary

Queensland boasts some of the most outstanding natural and living cultural landscapes remaining in the world. From the dense forests of the Great Dividing Range to the outback rivers of the Channel Country and north to the Savannahs of the Gulf and Cape York, our State has a wealth of remarkable and diverse landscapes and is of global biodiversity significance.

There are over 1000 threatened species of plant and animal found across Queensland. Despite this, only 8.6 % of Queensland's terrestrial area is protected, roughly half the state's target of 17%, and well below the average of other Australian states and territories.[1] [2]

Of the 51 million hectares of native forests in Queensland approximately 2.8 million hectares are publicly owned native state forests. These state forests support large tracts of intact habitat for a range of biodiversity values including endangered species and threatened ecological communities.

Greater gliders, koalas, quolls, glossy black cockatoos and many more threatened species can be found in Queensland's native state forests.

Greater Gliders in St Mary's State Forest. Photo: Suzanne Pearson

Queenslanders love nature, with polling showing that 77% want more national parks, and 71% support a doubling of parks by 2030. These figures are supported by

[1] The State of Queensland (Queensland Audit Office) (2023) Protecting our threatened animals and plants (Report 9: 2022–23).
[2] Commonwealth of Australia Department of the Environment and Energy (2023) Collaborative Australian Protected Areas Database (CAPAD) 2022.

enthusiastic public use of national parks, with almost two thirds of Queenslanders having visited a national park in the last 12 months.[3]

The expansion of protected areas is central to the outdoor recreation sector, which in turn delivers significant health and economic benefits for Queenslanders, and to Queensland's tourism industry, a major pillar of our economy. Over 90% of Queenslanders said national parks are important for their lifestyle.[4]

Tourism contributes $37.6 billion annually to Queensland's economy and sustains over 277,000 jobs across 65,000 businesses.[5] Nature-based tourism is a high-growth sector delivering strong returns on public investment. National Parks generate approximately 17,241 jobs across the tourism industry.[6]

With the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games on the horizon, Queensland has an unprecedented opportunity to show global leadership in conservation and sustainable tourism.

Many international tourists now look for genuine environmental credentials, and the government's ambition for 45 eco-tourism products by 2045 will only succeed with carefully planned, coordinated investment in product development and in the growth and management of protected areas.

However, the draft *Queensland Future Timber Plan 2050* establishes a narrative of sustained forestry access to 47 million hectares of state- and privately-owned forests.

Within this vast forest estate there are a diverse set of extrinsic and intrinsic values important to Queensland's urban, regional and remote communities. These are barely mentioned or overlooked in the draft *Future Timber Plan*.

While we welcome the Queensland Government's consultation on the draft *Future Timber Plan*¸ we are concerned land use decisions may be made without the requisite baseline data to support evidence-based decision making.

The expansion of protected areas is central to the outdoor recreation sector, which in turn delivers significant health and economic benefits for Queenslanders, and to Queensland's tourism industry, a major pillar of our economy.

[3] Public support for doubling Queensland's National Parks. Polling undertaken by YouGov 3–14 Jan. Protect Beautiful Queensland Alliance. 2024.
[4] Ibid
[5] Queensland Tourism Economic Key Facts 25 June 2025, Tourism and Events Queensland.
[6] Drimil S, Brown R, Silva CM. Estimating the value of National Parks to the Queensland Economy, School of Economics Discussion Papers Series 636. School of Economics, The University of Queensland. 2020.

The Natural Values of Queensland's Forests

Queensland is home to a remarkable 85% of Australia's native mammals, 72% of its native birds, and slightly over 50% of its native reptiles and frogs. Within Queensland, 1,049 species of plants and animals are classified as threatened under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*, with 713 species found only in Queensland.

By better protecting and managing Queensland's natural landscapes we can play a critical role in addressing the global extinction crisis and help protect Australia's unique natural and cultural heritage.

Ravenshoe State Forest. Photo: Paul Curtis.

Transition of public land such as state forests to the conservation estate is one of the most cost-effective pathways to increase the protected area network.[7] Many areas of national and conservation parks are the result of such transition, with more than 400,000 hectares converted in 1998-99 and a subsequent 13,000 hectares protected in 2024.[8]

Bioregional Significance

State forests contain significant biodiversity values as large tracts of remnant ecosystems and habitat for many native plants and animals. Queensland's Bioregional Planning Assessments (BPAs) have rated 80% of the state forest estate as of state level biodiversity significance, which includes 5% rated as state habitat for EVNT taxa[9], the highest significance category.[10]

[7] Fitzsimons J, Picone A, Partridge T, Cornish M, (2023). Protecting Australia's Nature: Pathways to protecting 30 per cent of land by 2030. The Nature Conservancy, WWF-Australia, the Australian Land Conservation Alliance and the Pew Charitable Trusts.

[8] Protect Beautiful Queensland (2025) Forests for Everyone, a New Era for South East Queensland's Forests.

[9] These are areas the expert panels identified as of special importance to threatened species, based on observation records.

[10] Conservation Opportunity in Queensland State Forest 2024, Pursey A and Marchant K, unpublished

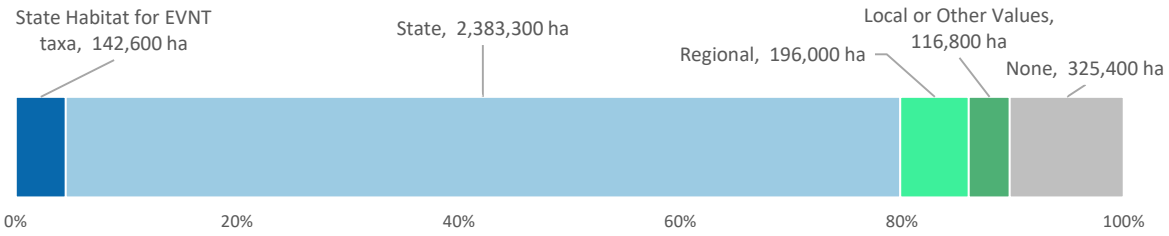

Figure 1. Proportion of Queensland's state forest estate in each biodiversity significance rating class

Table 1. Summary of biodiversity significance rating of state forest estate in Queensland

Biodiversity significance rating	Hectares in state forest estate	Percent of state forest estate
State Habitat for EVNT taxa	142,600	5%
State	2,383,300	75%
Regional	196,000	6%
Local or Other Values	116,800	4%
None	325,400	10%

Threatened Species

Queensland's state forests are home to a remarkable array of biodiversity, with mapped distributions indicating overlap for 289 nationally listed threatened species. Among these are 91 classified as endangered and 27 as critically endangered, highlighting the urgent conservation value of these landscapes.[11] The true richness of threatened species within state forests is understated, as more extensive survey effort would likely reveal additional records. Protecting and managing these habitats is vital to prevent further loss and to support the survival of some of Australia's most iconic threatened species including the koala, greater glider spot-tailed and northern quolls and glossy-black cockatoo.

The true richness of threatened species within state forests is understated, as more extensive survey effort would likely reveal additional records.

[11] Commonwealth of Australia Department of the Environment and Energy (2019) Australia - Species of National Environmental Significance Database (SNES)(Public Grids).

Endangered Regional Ecosystems

Endangered regional ecosystems are present in 2% of the state forest estate, and a further 11% contains regional ecosystems of concern (75,100 ha and 364,300 ha respectively). There is 2.8 million hectares of remnant native vegetation, with only 10% (320,100 ha) of the area non-remnant vegetation (Table 2).[12] In summary:

- 66 endangered regional ecosystems are represented in state forests.
- The endangered regional ecosystem 11.9.5 (*Acacia harpophylla* and/or Casuarina cristata open forest on fine-grained sedimentary rocks) has 8,600 hectares in state forests.
- 10 other endangered regional ecosystems each have more than 1,000 hectares of area in the state forest estate.

Table 2. Summary of vegetation management class area across state forest estate in Queensland

Vegetation management class	Hectares in state forest estate	Percent of state forest estate
Endangered - dominant	41,300	1%
Endangered - subdominant	33,800	1%
Of concern – dominant	166,000	5%
Of concern - subdominant	198,300	6%
Least Concern	2,403,500	76%
non-remnant	127,700	4%
Plantation	192,400	6%

Tropical rainforest in Lannercost State Forest. Photo: Paul Curtis.

[12] Conservation Opportunity in Queensland State Forest 2024, Pursey A and Marchant K, unpublished

Threatened Ecological Communities

The distribution of 17 nationally listed threatened ecological communities overlaps with Queensland's state forests, covering 41% (1.29 million ha) of the forest estate.[13] This includes 11 endangered, 1 vulnerable and 5 critically endangered communities (3). This includes:

- 25% of the likely extent of the critically endangered Mabi Forest (Complex Notophyll Vine Forest 5b) is found in Queensland's state forests. 22.7% of the extent is within the heavily cleared Wongabel State Forest.
- Over 900,000 hectares of the distribution of the endangered community Poplar Box Grassy Woodland on Alluvial Plains.
- 34,000 hectares of the endangered Brigalow community is within the state forest estate.

The Threatened Ecological Community of Mabi Forest in Wongabell State Forest. Photo: Kerry Trapnell

[13] Australian Government (Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment & Water) (2023) Ecological Communities of National Environmental Significance Distributions (ECNES).

Table 3. Threatened ecological communities within state forest estate in Queensland

Threatened ecological community	Listed status	Area in state forests (ha)	Total area of community (ha)	Percent in state forests
Mabi Forest (Complex Notophyll Vine Forest 5b)	CE	450	1,800	25%
Coastal Swamp Sclerophyll Forest of New South Wales and South East Queensland	E	83,100	1,143,100	7%
Subtropical eucalypt floodplain forest and woodland of the New South Wales North Coast and South East Queensland bioregions	E	215,000	3,222,800	7%
Broad leaf tea-tree (*Melaleuca viridiflora*) woodlands in high rainfall coastal north Queensland	E	3,600	54,400	7%
Lowland Rainforest of Subtropical Australia	CE	44,700	907,000	5%
Weeping Myall Woodlands	E	106,200	2,633,300	4%
Poplar Box Grassy Woodland on Alluvial Plains	E	910,600	25,254,800	4%
Semi-evergreen vine thickets of the Brigalow Belt (North and South) and Nandewar Bioregions	E	13,000	378,400	3%
Brigalow (*Acacia harpophylla* dominant and co-dominant)	E	34,000	1,057,800	3%
Lowland tropical rainforest of the Wet Tropics	E	3,000	171,400	2%
White Box-Yellow Box-Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodland and Derived Native Grassland	CE	28,400	4,467,000	1%
Natural grasslands on basalt and fine-textured alluvial plains of northern New South Wales and southern Queensland	CE	28,900	6,268,000	0.5%
Coastal Swamp Oak (*Casuarina glauca*) Forest of New South Wales and South East Queensland ecological community	E	230	89,400	0.3%
Subtropical and Temperate Coastal Saltmarsh	V	780	333,700	0.2%
Natural Grasslands of the Queensland Central Highlands and northern Fitzroy Basin	E	1,200	520,000	0.2%
Littoral Rainforest and Coastal Vine Thickets of Eastern Australia	CE	70	52,200	0.1%
Coolibah - Black Box Woodlands of the Darling Riverine Plains and the Brigalow Belt South Bioregions	E	2,600	2,225,700	0.1%

Commonwealth Legislation

Commencing in the late 1990s, the Commonwealth Government initiated the Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) process in partnership with state governments. RFAs were eventually signed in Tasmania, Victoria, Western Australia and New South Wales. Queensland did not sign an RFA due to divergent policy objectives with the Commonwealth government at the time.

Underpinning RFAs were Comprehensive Regional Assessments (CRAs) of each of the regional forest estates. These CRA's provided data on a wide range of values and were used to inform future land use. This included natural, cultural, timber and other values. RFAs became legislative instruments under the Regional Forest Agreements Act 2002.

In the year 2000, the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act) came into effect. The EPBC Act regulates actions that may significantly impact matters of national environmental significance (MNES). In the context of Queensland's forests this includes threatened species and ecological communities.

Native forestry operations are treated differently from other actions that may impact on a MNES that are otherwise protected by Australia's principal piece of environment legislation, the EPBC Act. Unlike other actions, forestry operations covered by an RFA are not required to obtain approval under the EPBC Act.

The RFA regime accredits a state's forestry system as environmentally adequate, and in return, forestry operations are exempt from needing approval under Part 9 of the EPBC Act for activities that may affect MNES, including threatened species and ecological communities. Section 38 of the EPBC Act implements this exemption.

The South East Queensland Forest Agreement, which is not an RFA, has no legal status and appears to have been superseded by subsequent government policy.

Forestry activities on Queensland public land need EPBC Act approval if they are likely to significantly affect an MNES. Since there is no RFA in Queensland, native forest logging in areas supporting populations of threatened species or threatened ecological communities need to be referred to the Commonwealth Government for approval under the EPBC Act.

Initiating a comprehensive assessment of Queensland forests for matters of national significance would help inform better forest management and, combined with additional protections and new conservation areas, would lead to better compliance with the EPBC Act.

Since there is no RFA in Queensland, native forest logging in areas with populations of threatened species or communities need to be referred to the Commonwealth Government for approval under the EPBC Act.

Recommendations in response to the Draft Plan

The Pew Charitable Trusts provides the following recommendations on the consultation draft *Queensland Future Timber Action Plan 2050.* We see these as critical milestones for the 5-year action plan and fundamental to delivering a credible outcome for Queensland's forests.

1. Protect South East Queensland State Forests

These state forests are close to highly populated areas and are valued by local communities for their recreational opportunities, including hiking, mountain biking, horse-riding, four-wheel driving and other activities. Where appropriate, these activities should be maintained and managed through dedicated facilities, access points and outreach for their sustainable and ongoing use.

Historic logging tracks are often suitable for activities such as mountain biking, horse riding, scenic driving and providing access to campsites. With careful planning, ecological values can be improved while enhancing access to nature for a wide range of outdoor enthusiasts in one of Australia's fastest growing regions.

Recreation groups and conservationists are advocating for the designation of these areas as conservation parks.[14] Transitioning these state forests into conservation parks will create new recreation, tourism, and lifestyle opportunities, while showing that the Queensland Government is responsive to community expectations.

The expansion of protected areas is central to the outdoor recreation sector, which in turn delivers significant health and economic benefits for Queenslanders, and to Queensland's tourism industry, a major pillar of our economy. Over 90% of Queenslanders said national parks are important for their lifestyle.[15]

Recommendations:

- Confirm an end to timber harvesting and update policy statements to include the transition of 50,000 hectares into the most appropriate protected area tenures to maintain their natural, cultural and social values.
- In partnership with First Nations groups, initiate community consultation to help inform future land use.
- Work with the outdoor recreation, tourism and conservation sectors to identify priority land use options to determine future management and tenure arrangements.
- Confirm there will be no loss to outdoor activity opportunities arising from future land tenure changes.

[14] Protect Beautiful Queensland, Forests for Everyone https://protectqueensland.org.au/campaigns/protect-native-forests/protect-south-east-queenslands-forests-for-future-generations/

[15] Public support for doubling Queensland's National Parks. Polling undertaken by YouGov 3–14 Jan. Protect Beautiful Queensland Alliance. 2024.

2. Assessment and recognition of biodiversity values

Queensland's state forests provide critical habitat for a wide range of threatened species and ecological communities, playing a vital role in the conservation of the state's unique biodiversity.

Unlike other jurisdictions with RFAs, Queensland's forestry operations are out of step with the requirements of the EPBC Act, especially where activities may impact Matters of National Environmental Significance such as threatened species.

The ongoing loss and fragmentation of forest habitats through logging and other extractive activities may be having a significant impact on populations of threatened species such as the greater glider and koala.

Recommendation: To ensure the long-term protection of Queensland's biodiversity, it is recommended that the Queensland government undertake a comprehensive assessment of the biodiversity values of all state forests and other forestry lands to:

- identify areas of high conservation value,
- with First Nations consent, add these areas to the protected area estate,
- while setting in place robust regulatory mechanisms aligned with the EPBC Act, and
- make the information publicly available.

3. Assessment and recognition of cultural value

Queensland's state forests are also rich living cultural landscapes with deep significance for First Nations peoples. These lands hold a wealth of values—spiritual, historical, and practical—shaped by tens of thousands of years of custodianship, traditional knowledge, and connection to Country.

Cultural sites, storylines, and resource areas occur throughout Queensland's forests, and their integrity is vital for the continuation of living cultural practices and the wellbeing of First Nations communities. However, these values have not always been systematically recognised or protected within forest management and planning frameworks.

Recommendation: To address this gap, it is recommended that the Queensland government undertake a thorough and collaborative assessment of First Nations cultural values across all state forests and forestry lands. This process should be led by First Nations peoples, ensuring that all sites and values—tangible and intangible—are appropriately documented and protected.

Areas of high cultural significance should be prioritised for inclusion into appropriate protected area tenures with the consent of Traditional Owners.

Culturally sensitive management protocols should be established for all forestry activities. Public reporting must respect cultural confidentiality while ensuring transparency and accountability in the recognition of First Nations heritage.

Pinnacle Rock in The Bluff State Forest in Far North Queensland. Photo: Kerry Trapnell

4. Review outdoor recreation and tourism opportunity

The economic benefits of national parks are well documented, with national park visitation contributing $2.7 billion per year to Queensland's economy. For every dollar spent on managing Queensland's national parks, an average $6.30 is generated in return from the tourism and hospitality sector.[16]

Further, nature-based recreation makes a significant contribution to the total social and economic benefits of sport and recreation, estimated at about $18 billion (or 5% of Gross State Product) in 2019.[17] Queensland's state forests possess significant commercial tourism potential that can contribute significantly to regional employment and economic growth.

Recommendation: the Queensland government prioritise the transition of suitable state forest areas into the protected area estate, supporting recreational infrastructure development and First Nations-led tourism. This approach aligns with the broader objectives of the Destination 2045 plan, which emphasises sustainable tourism growth, community wellbeing, and the protection of Queensland's unique natural and cultural assets.

[16] Driml S, Brown R, Moreno Silva C. Estimating the Value of National Parks to the Queensland Economy, Discussion Papers Series 636, School of Economics, University of Queensland. 2020

[17] Tunny G. Economic, Social and Health Impacts of Sport and Active Recreation in Queensland. Adept Economics. 2019. https://adepteconomics.com.au/resources/economic-contribution-of-sport-and-outdoor-recreation-in-qld-finalreport-may-19-2/

Embedding these strategies within the Queensland Future Timber Plan 2050, alongside explicit targets for protected area growth and nature-based tourism initiatives, will deliver enduring benefits for conservation, communities, and the economy.

Public Forests are highly valued recreational spaces and underpin a growing tourism industry centred on outdoor recreation. Photo: Ben Blanche

5. Protect Private Protected Areas

Timber harvesting within Queensland's nature refuges undermines the objectives of protected area management, which prioritise the conservation of biodiversity, cultural heritage, and the integrity of natural landscapes.

Timber harvesting risks undermining the confidence of committed landholders, third-party investors and philanthropic organisations whose support is contingent upon the assurance of long-term ecological protection and robust stewardship.

For example, Bush Heritage Australia (BHA) who manages private protected areas throughout Queensland, has invested significant resources into the acquisition and management of Carnarvon Station, a 57,009-hectare Nature Refuge. To protect this investment, BHA has applied for Special Wildlife Reserve (SWR) status for which they have received support from the Department of Environment, Science, Tourism and Innovation. However, their application for SWR has been delayed due to competing land use priorities.

The perceived or actual threat of timber harvesting can deter investment and philanthropic contributions and co-investment opportunities on both the public and private protected area estate. This scenario risks weakening the effectiveness of Queensland's protected area strategy and the efforts of the Department of

Environment, Science and Innovation (DETSI) to deliver enduring conservation outcomes.

Recommendation: To increase public trust and attract sustained third-party investment into related current government priorities, it is recommended that the Queensland Government moves to prohibit timber harvesting in appropriately identified nature refuges, and other land that is a strong candidate for the public protected area estate. This policy clarity will strengthen the credibility of Queensland's Future Timber Plan, strengthen DETSI's capacity to engage external partners and deliver the Protected Area Strategy, and provide a secure foundation for private and philanthropic support in advancing the state's conservation goals.

6. Increase Protection of State Forests Through Evidence-Based Transition

To support Queensland's long-term environmental, cultural, social, and economic prosperity, it is recommended that the Queensland Government commit to a significant and strategic expansion of the protected area estate by transitioning suitable state forests, following comprehensive assessments of their biodiversity, cultural, recreational, and tourism values.

Such baseline assessments will ensure that the unique ecological characteristics, First Nations and European cultural heritage, and the diverse recreational and tourism opportunities occurring in state forests are documented and recognised.

This evidence-based approach enables the identification of high-value areas for protection, ensuring that Queensland's most significant natural and cultural assets are safeguarded for future generations.

The expansion of protected areas from state forests will:

- Enhance the conservation of Queensland's biodiversity, mitigating the risks posed by incompatible land uses including timber harvesting and ensuring the resilience of ecosystems facing mounting environmental pressures.
- Uphold and enable First Nations-led management and sustainable tourism, supporting cultural revitalisation and community empowerment through stewardship of Country.
- Promote sustainable economic growth by underpinning nature-based tourism and recreation, sectors that already deliver billions in annual economic value and regional employment, while providing substantial returns on investment for park management.
- Support community wellbeing by providing accessible, high-quality natural spaces for outdoor recreation and social connection, and by embedding these protected areas in long-term planning frameworks such as the Destination 2045 plan and the Queensland Future Timber Plan 2050.

Transitioning high conservation value state forests into appropriate protected area tenures should be accompanied by an expanded ranger workforce, investment in management of natural and cultural values and dedicated investment in recreational infrastructure and First Nations-led tourism initiatives.

Dry vine forest dominated by hoop-pine in Benarkin State Forest. Photo: Ben Blanche.

It is recommended that the Queensland Government commit to a significant and strategic expansion of the protected area estate by transitioning suitable state forests to conservation and national park, following comprehensive assessments of their biodiversity, cultural, recreational, and tourism values.

Conclusion

Queensland's forests exist within a complex cultural, social and economic framework in which the rights and interests of First Nations peoples, local communities, and diverse stakeholders need to be given appropriate consideration in policy development.

Further, there are a diverse set of state, national and international policies that relate to Queensland's forests. These include global climate and biodiversity targets, nationally agreed agendas established by state, territory and federal ministerial meetings and state policies such as the Protected Area Strategy and the Destination 2045 policies.

Of particular concern is that timber harvesting in Queensland's native forests is out of step with our national environment law – the EPBC Act. Without significant reform in Queensland's compliance and increased transparency, public confidence in state-led forest stewardship seems unlikely.

Further, the groundwork has not been done to determine the best use of Queensland's forests. Baseline data on biodiversity, carbon, cultural heritage, tourism and recreational values does not exist in any systematic format. Therefore, decisions that are being made about timber supply from native forests are not made in full consideration of other values, weakening credibility around sustainability.

The draft Queensland Future Timber Action Plan 2050 appears to have been crafted in isolation of the broader policy, legislative and social context. There is an absence of detail and ambition on how forest management in Queensland can meet world's best practice.

The Pew Charitable Trusts strongly recommends that the first five-year action plan for the Future Timber Plan focuses on gathering baseline data across all values and that this information is publicly available.

In the absence of comprehensive baseline data and evidence-based assessments, policy and management decisions regarding Queensland's forests risk being misaligned with both conservation objectives and the broader public interest.