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PULP MILL ASSESSMENT ACT 2007 - APPROVAL OF PERMIT

[5.50 p.m.]

Mrs BUTLER (Lyons) - I would like to begin my contribution to this very important debate today with a story. As a member for the seat of Lyons in February 2006, I knew there were strong feelings being expressed about the possibility of a pulp mill in the Tamar Valley. I set up meetings and had a full afternoon of visitors scheduled. As the meetings progressed one man gathered a crowd around him in another part of the building. It was hard to hear the varied concerns being raised by the constituents who had booked appointments because of the growing noise from the other room. The mob mentality had taken over through the noisy remonstrations of the leader and at one point they demanded that I see them on the spot, with no regard for the other people who had made appointments. I offered them a 3.30 spot but they could not wait another 30 minutes. They left the building, but they graffitied my car and left a very nasty note on the windscreen. This is just one example of the noise and emotion of this debate that has frightened logical people for the last three years. The people who had booked appointments expressed a range of views on many different issues. Those who raised the possibility of a pulp mill spoke honestly and openly on both sides of the debate.

With the memory of the old Wesley Vale mill debate in mind, I have pursued many different opinions in the development since then from all over the electorate. One couple in particular from that day stand out in my memory. They lived in Canada and told me unequivocally that all the pulp mills in Canada stink. I used to live near the Mary Vale mill in Victoria as a child and have strong memories of the odours that used to drift in the air on certain winds. I knew that had since been eliminated and my curiosity was aroused. I have spoken to families who have been involved in forestry for many decades. I have spoken to fishermen, women, shopkeepers, truck drivers, people who live opposite the proposed site, councillors, business owners, farmers, tourism operators, miners, teachers and retirees. The constituents who are in favour of the proposed mill have not been so loud and many of them do not use e-mail. They speak directly or by phone, they wink or say, 'Keep up the good work', or they just smile in an encouraging way. From my point of view, that is the silent majority in the seat of Lyons.

Some people who live close to the proposed site are vehemently opposed to anything occurring at all and want the site reclassified. Some would prefer to wait until another heavy industrial project comes along; others state that they prefer to see the current mill proposal as they are convinced that the strictest safeguards ever imposed on a major project will be applied. They do not wish to see a repeat of earlier difficulties experienced with heavy industries opposite. They are also very pleased at the prospect of jobs for their growing children, which will be a direct outcome from the increased activity the proposed mill would bring.

I remind members that the proposed site is zoned 'heavy industrial', not 'pristine wilderness' as alleged by many people opposed to the development. According to my old dictionary 'pristine' mean 'of or pertaining to the earliest period or state, original, former, primitive, ancient'. At an NRM meeting a few years ago I was reminded by Greens candidate, John Collins, that nothing in Tasmania has been pristine since the white man arrived in our State. As I understand it, if given approval, the mill is to be constructed in the Bell Bay major industrial site which has been especially zoned for heavy industry since 1972. To the best of my knowledge, the area currently houses an electricity substation, an aluminium powder plant, a ferro-alloy smelter, two woodchip mills, a thermal power station, a municipal landfill, an aluminium smelter, a municipal sewerage treatment plant and a major port. Hardly a pristine environment.

I travelled recently to Canada and I would like to show members some photos I took there. This is the Port Alberni mill on the west coast of British Columbia. You can see that there is a fishing boat right by this dreadful mill, supposedly. There are fishing and boating clubs and a restaurant with people eating within a few hundred metres of that pulp mill. Upstream and over the next hill the beautiful Lake Sooke is surrounded by architecturally-designed new houses of \$1 million values. Hardly what one would expect if the claims about odour emissions were correct. They cannot keep up with the demand for housing there. Driving back to Victoria through beautiful old-growth forest I saw another newer pulp mill, again with new condominiums and high-end real estate development within a few kilometres of the plant. The wine growing area of Duncan sits between two pulp mills in British Columbia. New vineyards are under development as the industry continues to thrive.

In terms of health effects, even though they may have pulp mills and have had for more than 40 years, life expectancy in British Columbia in 2001 was 80.7 years, the second-highest in the world next to Japan. Tasmania's average life expectancy in 2002, on the other hand, was 79.2 years, below the national average of 80.5 years.

The fishing industry remains in Canada's three top industries in spite of their numerous pulp mills. There are mills in dry areas such as Kamloops not very far from the wine growing area of Okenagan. From my observations in New Zealand and France, tourism in Canada is frequently linked to areas where pulp mills are the mainstay of the economy. Kamloops, for example, has a university with students from 53 countries, a thriving tourism business, the headquarters of Canadian Pacific Railway, movie production and white-water rafting.

Are we to really believe that we are not going to benefit from the experiences of nations like Canada, Germany and Finland over the last 40 years? Germany has the greenest government in the world and the strictest guidelines in the world until our current pulp mill proposal came along.

Perhaps for those who live in a paperless society there will be some sort of benevolent power but for most of us here today we see more newspapers than ever, more magazines than ever, more books, more coffee drunk out of plastic-coated paper cups than ever. It is puzzling to me that it is mainly urban middle-class people who tend to support the Green movement and yet they read the books, the newspapers and magazines and drink the coffee from the paper cups so frequently carried with them to their desks. So many apparently educated people are willing to believe one opinion and completely disregard people with over three decades of expertise in this scientific field.

Perhaps we should be asking questions of ourselves about the morality of buying from countries less well-off than ourselves. As a Labor Party member of

over 30 years it has been a strong ambition of mine to see the end of the ridiculous export of woodchips to be processed overseas and then bought back at inflated prices. For years, I, among other branch members throughout Tasmania, have moved motions, attended and chaired policy committees and communicated through all channels available within the Labor Party and union structures to get our message heard and to lobby for an end to this practice. With the agreement to go ahead with the pulp mill, the decades of wasted opportunities for jobs and downstream processing of our natural resources will end.

We are able to grow good trees, pulp attracts good prices and it is unbelievable that we import pulp from Indonesia for north-west Tasmanian paper mills to turn into photocopier paper and for Woolworths to now import tissues from that same country.

The potential for tourism is terrific with workers and their families likely to spend their breaks in our great State. The multiplier effect means that there are likely to be seven jobs for every full-time equivalent created by the mill. Tourism, remember, is a discretionary spend. We need year-round employment in Tasmania as a base for entrepreneurs to build on.

I would like to quote from *Hansard* 7 February 1995 where Premier Ray Groom described the Greens as being in favour of a pulp mill. He said: 'I can recall Dr Brown on a number of occasions saying, "Why don't you build a pulp mill?"'

That is not what he was saying last night, as I recall.

He attacked me, the then Premier and others at the time saying, 'You have this woodchip industry, why don't you build a pulp mill to process the woodchips in Tasmania?' We know what happened to the proposal put forward at that time. The Greens turned around and attacked it soundly.

Mrs Milne on the same day in 1995 in relation to pulp mills said: 'Let's have a plantation based one.'

In November 1995, Ms Putt, member for Denison stated that: 'Both governments had become fixated again because of the power of the native forest lobby on the native forest fed mill despite the fact that there are enormous amounts of plantation material in the ground, on line now and coming on line in the next few years; it could feed a mill. A semi-thermomechanical mill would be able to be up and running based entirely on the plantation resource in Tasmania by the year 2000.'

The member for Denison continued: 'The plantation' -

and I think she meant 'sector' -

'is one where all jobs growth is and where all the downstream processing is going on, where there is clearly an intention to invest more.'

Ms Putt continues - and I think this is important: 'Is the Government really about jobs and downstream processing and using our resources to benefit Tasmanians?'

Ms Putt, I ask you: are the Greens really about jobs and downstream processing and using our resources to benefit Tasmanians?

Surely in this instance the proponents have had so much information examined, cross-examined, tightened up and scrutinised in the most rigorous set of steps yet seen in our State; well, guess what - it is still not good enough for the Greens. Ms Putt still does not trust a corporate entity. The proponent's plans detail the increasing use of plantation timbers as the Greens wanted in 1995, with value adding as the Greens wanted, and its pulp mill using utilising woodchips, the concept of which was put forward by Dr Bob Brown in 1995. It seems there is no pleasing the Greens.

Is it really the site or particular technology that is the problem or is it the fact that they have great difficulty in trusting a corporate entity? Is there a particular aim of undermining any form of large investment for our State? Surely, they must have some form of social conscience.

Citizens of Tasmania who work in forestry and allied industries might not be university educated but so many of the people whom I know in the electorate are passionate about our forests, especially those who work with trees. They care about their work, they love what they do. Their lives have been on hold while this three-year process has transpired. In at least two of the provinces of Canada the Green movement there is working co-operatively with forest and lands and universities to make sure that there are plenty of opportunities for training in the industry. They are not hell-bent on destroying a whole industry with the constant negativity that we see here in Tasmania.

I do not understand how Greens members can purport to love forests but actively destroy the credibility of all those people who are charged by the State with the care of those assets. Mr Speaker, surely it is in the interests of all our children and grandchildren to care for our forests and maintain them in a balanced way. We need to have local people who understand our weather, our winds, the needs of our wild creatures for particular habitats, the strength of our biodiversity and the nature of our landscapes in stewardship of our beautiful forests.

I call on the Greens today to work co-operatively with the university, TAFE and forestry in order to address this urgent need for increased training opportunities and numbers. Do not peel off an industry that Tasmania needs. Let commonsense prevail. Negativity is poisoning an industry that we used to be proud of. If it can happen in other parts of the world, why not here? There is much work to be done but constant denigration of our industry has left a workforce feeling demotivated and devalued.

Mr Speaker, it would be easy for the Government to sit on its hands and do nothing. I believe that we as a government have a moral responsibility to do our very best, and a moral obligation to provide opportunities for economic and industrial development and infrastructure that is safe for our people. I believe that it is time to move on to progress this project and put Tasmania on a solid sustainable base for a bright future for our children and grandchildren. Therefore I support the pulp mill.