SUBMISSION TO THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SELECT COMMITTEE

The Tasmanian Forests Agreement Bill 2013
This submission to the Select Committee has been compiled based on the Huon Valley Council’s communications to parliament and media releases as set out in previous Council meetings.

The ‘Tasmania’s Regional Councils’ group of which the Huon Valley Council is a member (further to the Huon Valley Council resolution 15.025/12* - 18 July 2012 Ordinary Council meeting) has also made a submission to the enquiry which is to be read in conjunction with this submission.

The Huon Valley Council’s submission to this enquiry is as follows:

1. The forestry industry is of vital importance in the Huon Valley. One of the significant employers in the region is Ta Ann which has been a welcome addition to the Huon Valley since 2007 and recently announced plans for expansion.

2. Other vital businesses include forest contractors involved in harvest and transport, as well as businesses that support these operations such as mechanics, maintenance, and suppliers of a wide range of goods and services.

3. The forestry industry is significant to the economy of the Huon Valley with an approximate value of $19.5 million (Huon Valley Council Economic Development Strategy 2009).
   - The industry employs 323 Full time employees (as at 20 May 2011)
   - $79.6 million in raw materials extracted and wages paid in the Huon district
   - $18.2 million in value adding to materials extracted in the Huon district
   - $421,751 in rates and taxes paid in 2010-2011 from the forestry industry

4. The Huon Valley Council stands to lose significant rate income in the declaration of ‘reserve’ areas. This will likely lead to increased costs in the rates for the Huon Valley community or a reduction in services which cannot be funded from the general rate.

   The maps of the proposed reserve areas are unclear and provide a poor indication of the proposed reserve areas. Accurate mapping is necessary to enable the Council to forecast the loss to the general rate and budget for the losses accordingly. These are required prior to the introduction of the legislation as it is not possible to determine the full impact without it.

5. The Huon Valley Council wrote to the Premier in September 2011 citing resolution 13.012/11*, which was copied to other Tasmanian Councils and included the following:
d) The Government legislate to guarantee wood supply to TA-ANN.

This is a reiteration of the Council resolution passed at the Ordinary Council meeting held 8 December 2010. The motion was as follows:

13.003/10*

That the Huon Valley Council:-

1. Strongly condemns any further lock up or reservation of Tasmania’s state native forests.
2. Advocates for our local timber mills to have their wood supply contracts and supply levels extended until 2027 as a minimum.
3. Requests the State and Federal Governments to re-affirm their commitment to the Regional Forest Agreement.

6. The Council does not feel that local business or retail and service providers have been provided for in the legislation even though they are directly impacted by the contractors and others moving from the region. Whilst the compensation is just and necessary for those contractors affected by the creation of forest reserves, there is no recognition of the antecedent businesses that are also suffering from the downturn in the industry.

7. The Huon Valley Council seeks information as to when and where promised compensation would be payable. The expectation that the Council support legislation that will prove costly to the community with no indication of how the region would be compensated is unrealistic and unreasonable.

8. Further concern in the content of the legislation is noted in that if any provisions of the Tasmanian Forests Agreement Act 2012 are inconsistent with the provisions of other acts including the Forest Practices Act 1985, Land Titles Act 1980 and Crown Lands Act 1976, then the provisions of the Tasmanian Forest Agreement Act 2012 will prevail. Such authority set in legislation - which is arbitrary in content makes future planning difficult and enforcement practically impossible whilst there is no clarity on the 'reserve' areas.

9. The Tasmanian Forests Agreement Act 2012 makes no provision for cooperation from the organisations party to the 'Agreement' that protest action will cease. This Council has little confidence that the legislation will ensure an end to protest action and ensure a balanced and sustainable future for legal forestry operations in the region.

SIMONE WATSON
ACTING GENERAL MANAGER – HUON VALLEY COUNCIL