

Submission to the Legislative Council Select Committee re the Tasmanian Forests Agreement Bill 2012

Submitted by: Geoff Wilkinson, Unit 2, 654 Oceana Drive, Tranmere, Tasmania 7018
geoff_t_wilkinson@yahoo.com.au

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Dear Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to present my views and concerns as a past employee of Tasmania's Timber industry. Also thank you for allowing me an extension of time to prepare this presentation.

The reason I have prepared this submission is because I hold grave concerns about the future of the industry, Tasmania and its forests.

I would like to begin by providing a 10.5 minute video clip, as an overview in order to assist in introducing these points of view. The content of the video was taken over a period of several years and provides an example of how native forest coupes are planned and managed.

I am therefore trying to explain in 10 minutes the complexity of good forest management. It is almost an impossible task.

Private property is regulated and managed in exactly the same way as State Forest under the Forest Practices Act and Code. Tasmania's Forest Practices system is believed to be one of, if not the best in the World.

Please note this is simply one example of forest management and is not intended in any way to define forest management as a whole. Indeed there are many management prescriptions available, which are required for the many and varied forest types.

This coupe is located on private property at Bruny Island. The property was harvested for saw logs in the late 1880's, again during the mid 1950's and finally an integrated saw log pulpwood harvest in 2005.

A wild fire burned this forest in 1998, significantly damaging the stand. Given the damage and in consultation with the landowner, it was decided to harvest the commercial timber before it suffered further deterioration due to woodman, borer etc. A clear fall prescription was determined as the most appropriate.

The introductory photo shows the coupe shortly prior to the 2005 harvesting.

PLAY VIDEO:

A picture tells a thousand words, so the saying goes and I hope this video has assisted you all in some small way to understand a little more clearly some of the process that goes into planning, managing and regenerating a native forest coupe.

At the beginning of the planning process an area of land is mapped out for potential harvest and management. By the time planning is complete there is more often than not at least 30% of that area discounted for reserves of one sort or another. Often this percentage can be considerably more.

The video has shown at a glance a multitude of things that have to be taken into account when planning and undertaking a forestry operation project. As you would appreciate there are many other issues, which are not included in the clip as time has not allowed.

Weed management of gorse from spreading throughout the coupe, from where it was identified growing along the coupe edges being one. Evidence of erosion of creeks below the coupe in the adjacent pasture highlighted a significant issue that required careful planning to avoid accentuating the issue. Additional work, time and cost associated with preparing and waiting for approval of a Development Application was required.

As Keith Bill stated in the clip, “the result is, it seems to be a Win Win for everyone’s circumstance, the environment has been looked after, the coupe has been regenerated”.

Personally I am proud to have been involved in the planning and delivery of the results from this project, to contribute to Tasmania’s timber industry, and having been associated with hundreds of dedicated colleagues over the past 38 years.

We have delivered essential timber products that each and every one of you use every day. It is a true renewable resource, which grows on solar energy.

On a broader scale planning is required to ensure supply of product to wood processing facilities throughout the year.

Much of the area available for harvest does not lend itself to winter harvest. Landscape issues can impinge significantly on areas available.

When a Wedge-tailed eagle nest is found we have to manage around 6 months of the year due to the breeding season. The area within 500 meters of the nest and a kilometer line of sight is restricted. Often we may not know about the location of these nests until well into the planning process. Helicopter searches for potential nest sites must be conducted outside of the breeding season.

Dispersal of harvest coupes is necessary to ensure not too much of an individual water catchment is harvested at any one time. In order to manage fire, coupes are harvested and regeneration burns completed prior to commencement in adjoining areas.

Industry experiences peaks and troughs and vagaries of market conditions. During these periods planning must be modified to select coupes that allow for those changes, so that the precious resource is not wasted.

There are issues to be considered and managed surrounding neighbor concerns, school bus times for cartage and the list goes on.

Now I will get to the point.

Every time legislation creates National Parks and World Heritage from commercial forests, this places **incredible additional pressure** on the planning and implementation of forestry operations.

Many times in the past modeling has been conducted to determine how much forest needs to be maintained to ensure a viable timber industry. Unfortunately these models often do not reflect reality. Legislative Councilors may not be aware that when planning for forest operations the following special values must be addressed? Flora, Fauna, Geomorphology, Archaeology, Landscape, Soil and Water.

Depending on the severity of a wild fire, a commercial forest may not necessarily be destroyed however the timber most certainly will be devalued to some degree. If the trees are not killed it is preferable to leave them standing for several years prior to harvest. If there are coupes already planned in those fire affected areas they will need to be postponed and others pursued.

In order to access coupes roads are planned, often during winter months and constructed during summer. It is neither simple nor economical to plan and build access to alternate coupes at the drop of a hat. There are no longer numerous contingency coupes available when unforeseen events crop up.

Destroying the Truth

ENGO campaigners use tactics that have infamously be used in the past such as, “if you repeat something often enough people will believe it”.

They continuously claim that timber harvesting destroys the forests and it’s conservation values. Their message is that forestry is under regulated and that little planning or care goes into the protection of environmental values. Such propaganda has been used to demonise the timber industry with the assistance of media, and in some cases, in particular the ABC and Mercury have been complicit in this campaign. For example the Four Corners “Lords of The Forests” or the reporting of the proposed harvesting of private property at Recherche Bay. Whilst the media might seek comment from the timber industry they do not show the detailed planning process you have witnessed in the video and supplied information.

No other industry has been subjected to the relentless attacks directed at the timber industry, but now the coal, gas and fishing industries, financial backers, markets, including people’s investments are being targeted.

Several decisions made over the last couple of decades have been made in order to appease the ENGO’s. Each of those decisions has led to further lock up of our forests, until now where we have some 48% of Tasmania’s landmass under some form of reserve. These decisions have frustrated forest planners as the goal posts keep changing.

When a child demands something in an inappropriate way and is rewarded, their natural reaction is to use the same behavior again. If bad behavior results in achieving a desired outcome, then the lesson learned is that bad behavior is acceptable and will be repeated.

We have tried working with governments for decades and taken on the chin time after time after time, when additions have been made to our reserve systems in the hope of finding an end to the conflict. We have compromised time and time and time again, FOR WHAT!

I have personally been subjected to assault in the form of be pushed, shoved and jostled by ENGO's while attempting to go about my work. This was part of the original Gunns 20 fiasco, which was eventually dropped by Greg L'Estrange, who didn't even have the decency to contact me to discuss the matter prior to capitulating to the ENGO's. This is a situation where an employee has no access to a redress of wrongs.

I ask the Councillor's what would happen if someone from the public treated members of this house in that manner in this place? I have no doubt that security officers, police and the judicial system would very swiftly deal with that person.

Why is it then that those of us who have been going about our lawful business have been subjected to unlawful protests, blockades and assault for decades without similar protection? Are we less worthy citizens?

Many in the industry including myself were pleased by the action of members of the Legislative Council in February 2012, that was led by Ruth Forrest in her press release of 13 February 2012, to counter the deceitful and dishonest actions by green groups.

Solution to Market Blackmail and Protests:

Rather than additional massive reservation Parliament should critically consider the following legislation actions.

We have in this country legislation that provides protection from defamation to these ENGO's. This legislation must be repealed in order to provide a level playing field for businesses.

It is time that our Legislators passed strong legislation to protect people going about their legitimate employment, including perpetrators of overseas industrial sabotage.

Well Planned Harvesting Retains High Conservation value

On Friday 3rd June 2011 the Minister for Environment, Parks and Heritage, Brian Wightman, awarded Jan Cameron and the Tasmanian Land Conservancy (TLC), the Environmental Stewardship Award and the Minister's Choice categories at the 2011 Tasmanian Awards for Environmental Excellence. The Conservancy and Jan Cameron bought 27,390 hectares from Gunns Ltd in October 2010. Mr Wightman said, "This is a significant project that will ensure the protection of the properties' nationally significant conservation values."

Mr Wightman's comments and award to the TLC and Jan Cameron formulate the ultimate insult, to those dedicated people who have managed these properties for the past 30, 40 and up to 50 years. It is the employees of Tasmanian Board Mills, Forest Resources, Boral, North Forest Products and finally Gunns, who with their expertise and the maintenance of the principals of the Forest Practices system, have ensured these properties are so worthy of Jan Cameron's and the TLC's interest. These properties have been managed for timber production over all that time while at the same time managing all the other values captured within their boundaries. Only time will tell how well Jan

Cameron and the Tasmanian Land Conservancy will manage them into the future and they should be judged on their achievements in due course.

Mr Wightman should have presented the environmental awards to those who have already demonstrated how they have ensured the values he refers to, have been so well protected up until now, and to recognise those who are actually responsible for the excellent condition in which these properties have been passed on.

The sale of some of Tasmania's best production native forest private property to Jan Cameron, essentially removed the opportunity for saw miller's to access the high quality saw logs from those properties, even if Gunns didn't want them.

The sale of the Triabunna export woodchip facility to Cameron and Wood was the final nail in the coffin, to strangle the remaining breath from a viable industry. Without that facility it is obvious to anyone in the industry, there is no other appropriate location in the south of the state, that can be used to export the pulpwood generated from forestry operations. L'Estrange knew that, and I have no doubt this was at the forefront of his decision to sell to Cameron and Wood for \$10 million, and at a significantly reduced price to that which was being negotiated with Ron O'Connor i.e. \$16 million.

Greg L'Estrange blew into Tasmania believing that he was smarter than anyone who had preceded him. He thought he could negotiate with the ENGO's a deal that would gain their support for a pulp mill. L'Estrange jumped into bed with the ENGO's and sold out Tasmania's entire native forest timber industry in his attempt for what I believe was his own personal gain, leaving the State as a millionaire while thousands unemployed left behind in Tasmania.

Incremental Loss of Production Forest

The attached series of maps shows the incremental increase in reserve area from pre 1981 when there were 600,000 hectares in National Parks and State Reserves up to now where we have some 3 million ha covering 48% of Tasmania's land mass. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature has a 2010 benchmark of 10%, almost five times less than what is currently reserved in Tasmania.

These maps graphically illustrate the fact that the ENGO's have never and will never be satisfied no matter what is given up to them. They also demonstrate the incremental reduction of area available for sustainable timber production, separated by time and space.

Moving forward:

In conclusion I make the following points:

Commercial forest area is managed over 80/100 years of rotation, in that space of time there could be 20 plus changes of government with different policies affecting forest management. Special species are managed over considerably longer rotations.

- There is not one legitimate reason for placing one more hectare of Tasmania's forests in reserve outside of the provisions of the Forest Practices Code.
- Tasmanian Forest Practices are world standard.
- We have and can continue to provide forest products from current practices while still looking after environmental issues.
- Tasmania already has almost five times the reservation benchmarked for 2010 by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.
- ENGO's under the current circumstances will not stop their insatiable appetite to continue to campaign for further reservation.
- The key to resolving conflict in Tasmania's forests is not in any further reservation; it is in providing the fundamental right and protection through legislation, to allow people and businesses to go about their lawful activities.

Yours sincerely

Geoff Wilkinson