

## Inaugural Speech – Robert Armstrong MLC



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Legislative Council

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Electorate: Huon

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### FORESTRY (REBUILDING THE FOREST INDUSTRY) BILL 2014 Second Reading

**Mr ARMSTRONG** (Huon - Inaugural) - Mr President, I rise for my inaugural speech to speak on this bill, the Forestry (Rebuilding the Forest Industry) Bill 2014.

Before I focus on the bill I would like to acknowledge the work of Paul Harriss over the last 18 years in this House, and also in the Huon electorate. Paul was a respected and fierce advocate for the Huon electorate, and he will be sadly missed in this House. Paul's energy and expertise no doubt will be continued in his new position as the member for Franklin and particularly as the Minister for Resources in the Liberal Government. His passion for the forest industry is well known. I wish him well in his endeavours, as this bill states, to rebuild the forest industry.

I also thank all the people who voted for me in my election on 3 May last. The experience of electioneering is one I value. It certainly focuses your mind on what are the cutting edges in and around the electorate and how those issues could affect, or already have affected, people's livelihoods and, in particular, their quality of life.

As has been often said, the independence of the Legislative Council is not far from the forefront of people's minds when they elect their member. It is evident that, with my election and the election for the member of Rosevears, it was the community's wish to elect independent people to the Legislative Council. I thank those out of the 20 616 people who actually voted, and for the confidence they had in me to represent them for the next six years.

I pass on my heartfelt thanks to my family for their support during the election journey and to everyone who assisted with my campaign. It would have been almost impossible to have won the election without their emotional and physical support. I will now undertake to do everything I can to justify the voters' confidence in me to serve the people of the Huon electorate.

I consider myself very privileged to be the member for an electorate which is one of the most picturesque and purest places in Tasmania. Our area has gained a reputation not only for its natural beauty but also for its rich cultural aspects and World Heritage, with each town having a unique and diverse identity, along with a history to be proud of.

Some of our well-known electorate characteristics are forestry, fruit growing, fishing, boat building, agriculture, tourism, and the production of fine gourmet foods, juices, wine and cider.

As many of you would know, aquaculture has been a real success story for my electorate. Our aquaculture produce is not only well known throughout Australia but is considered to be some of the best worldwide. We have a number of fruit juice producers throughout the region whose products are not only well liked by the locals but also are popular items on all supermarket shelves. Locals and tourists are flocking in their hundreds to taste the award-winning beverages from our numerous wineries and cider outlets.

Bruny Island has been a particular favourite of tourists and locals for some time now. This is not only due to its majestic ocean and land scenery but also because of its award-winning cheeses, oyster farms, the fudge factory, wineries and the fun-filled, exciting adventure tours.

Some other fantastic places to visit in the Huon electorate area are the Tahune AirWalk, which has been labelled as Australia's most spectacular tree-top walk; the Hastings Caves, with its relaxing thermal springs pool, and the Newdegate Cave, the largest tourist cave in Australia that occurs in dolomite rather than limestone; and the Ida Bay Railway, which is the last operating bush tramway in southern Tasmania and the most southern railway in Australia. The last two places mentioned have been my favourites for many years. I also point out that, in

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particular, the Ida Bay Railway is in need of government support to keep it operational and to enable it to stay at the top of tourists' bucket lists.

Walking holidays are becoming very popular and the South Coast Walk is well known, and is regularly featured in a number of bushwalking magazines. There is a real opportunity in developing a walk to South East Cape - Australia's southernmost point. Tourists love to have their happy snaps taken at iconic places in Australia, for example the northernmost point of Cape York Peninsula, Northern Queensland; the easternmost point of Cape Byron, New South Wales; and the western point of Steeple Point, Western Australia. Imagine tourists flocking to see the most southern iconic point and taking a walk in some of the most picturesque forests and coastlines in the world, with arguably the freshest, cleanest and clearest air in the world. I want to do all I can to lobby for such a walk. It would be a fantastic opportunity to boost the tourism industry, and provide people with an unforgettable experience, one that is not currently easily accessible to the average novice walker.

I boasted about some of the many highlights of the Huon electorate. I want to touch on a couple of statistics, which are disturbing and require some attention. The results of the 2011 census showed that there were 33 182 people in the Huon electorate. The worrying statistic was that only 20.3 percent of this total was aged between 20 and 39. From that, only 8.6 per cent were in the age group 20 to 29. This shows that a significant number of our younger people are leaving the area at an age when they could be energetic leaders and entrepreneurs. We have to find ways of keeping the younger generation in the electorate. The best way to do that is to provide jobs.

In the same census of 2011, being the last with available figures, 15 643 people aged 15 and over were reported being in the labour force. From this total, only 54 per cent of these individuals were employed full time. This highlights that there is a real need for employment opportunities, which would stimulate the electorate economically, and further enhance it as a perfect environment to live and raise a family. Remember, these figures were before the real downturn in the forest industry. It is envisaged that the figures would be more alarming now than in 2011.

That brings me to this bill, the Forestry (Rebuilding the Forest Industry) Bill. In my position as mayor I watched with despair as the Tasmanian Forests Agreement Act gained support within The parliament. I wondered whether the 572 000 hectares of land that would suddenly cease to be available to the forest industry was ring-fenced for any real conservation area value, or rather was it just numbers settled upon by environmentalists and government for no other reason than political gain.

There appeared to be no real scientific assessment in the exercise, no vigorous assessment that was heralded by the Regional Forest Agreement. It was just numbers agreed to by people who were not experts in forestry, science, carbon sequestration, the environment, or the like. I am not in any way criticising the work done by the body, but I am saying if you want the best evidence of what should or should not be preserved for conservation, you should go to the experts in that field. To allow lay people with conflicts of interest to be involved only courts disaster. That disaster greatly affected people within my community. If I have a problem with a heart, I go to a heart specialist. If I have a problem with a house extension, I go to an engineer or an architect. If I have a legal issue, I go to a lawyer. Yet, when the government had issues with the forests, did it go to scientists, foresters and the like? No, it went to lay people - well intentioned, no doubt, but not in any proper way able to understand the scientific methods to be used in defining what is forest or land that has no real conservation value. You may as well have asked me. Therefore, it is important to allow the experts to have their say, and allow science to do its work in identifying what should or should not be reserved.

I, like many other Tasmanians, love and value our environment, and as a person who was born and raised in the country I know firsthand the importance of forest stewardship.

I am also well aware of the importance of wood. In a recent article titled 'Why Wood?', it stated wood is beautiful, renewable, environmentally friendly, easy to use and cost-effective, and I agree. Sustainably managed forests are the lungs of the planet and wood is the most abundant renewable resource on earth. Every kilogram of tree growth, I am told, removes almost 1.5 kilograms of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and returns more than 1 kilogram of oxygen into the air. Timber is greenhouse-friendly and is the only major building material which stores more carbon than it releases. Research at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology shows that using wood instead of other building products can reduce greenhouse gas emissions over the life of a typical house by as much as a medium-sized car would emit over seven years.

Wood has a higher strength-to-weight ratio than structural steel and is a far better insulator than brick, steel or aluminium. A number of countries, including Australia, are recognising the advantages of wood.

In this economic environment when the Federal Government is cutting our budget to the states, we should not be standing in the way of Tasmania positioning itself to responsibly manage and use our own wood resource.

The 10-storey Forte complex in Melbourne was the world's tallest timber apartment building when it was opened in 2013. Engineered wood is being used in New Zealand for lightweight, flexible, earthquake-resistant

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construction to help in the rebuilding of Christchurch. I ask myself, why in recent times, has Tasmania wanted to lock up its renewable wood resource and not avail itself of the opportunities which are now presenting themselves worldwide? People are saying there is no demand. Well, ask the sawmillers in Tasmania about demand. They can't get enough product, would be their answer.

As an example, in a recent forestry briefing it was stated that in the early 1990s the special timber sector was obtaining approximately 5 000 cubic metres of myrtle and they are now scratching to get 500 cubic metres. This has to have a negative impact on employment and business opportunities, not to mention the passing on of special timber skills. If you do not have the material to work with, then how can this happen?

Ask the building contracting firm in Tasmania that is building a significant complex for approximately \$25 million, and that endeavoured to procure 12 000 metres of framing timber from Tasmania, and then were told that timber had to be procured from New South Wales. There needs to be a change. There needs to be a rebuilding of our timber industry.

The Government in its second reading speech recognises that broadscale woodchipping is not Tasmania's wish. The five electorates of Tasmania voted that there was a need for change and part of that change was casting aside the Tasmanian Forests Agreement Act.

That brings me to the question of mandate. I accept that people vote for parties for a number of reasons, but where an issue is on the front line of a party's election material and promises and that is splashed all over the media then we legislators should take notice.

The *Oxford Dictionary* defines 'mandate' as being 'the authority to carry out a policy regarded as given by the electorate to a party or candidate that wins an election'. I would think that the people of Tasmania, especially in the country electorates, voted for a change in our forest legislation. A very strong mandate has been given to the Government to act and it is up to us to act.

Recently I heard Greens Senator, Christine Milne, on a program, being asked, 'Don't you think the people voted for a repeal of the carbon tax? It was front and centre of the Liberal National Party Election platform'. Her answer was to the effect, 'Well, I think the electorate is now better educated and understands the issue better than it did at the election'. Well really, are we going to say the same type of thing to our electors? My view is, they voted for a change in forest policy and it is incumbent on us to vote the same way. That is what mandate dictates.

Mr President, I know that some people may say that this bill does not change much but I would argue that it does. The underlying principle of this bill is, rather than lock up production capacity forest forever, or until there is new legislation which the TFA act did, this legislation allows that land to be available for future assessment for forest product production into the future. This is a significant difference in policy to the TFA.

**Members** - Hear, hear