

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

My submission to the Legislative Council (LegCo) addresses the statesman/woman in each Councilor.

It seems to me that in the comprehensive and wildly contradictory claims, hopes and demands hurled at the LegCo and particularly the Select Committee (the committee), the big picture about the role of forestry is getting buried. That may be convenient for some, but the public good is not properly addressed.

Forestry operations in Tasmanian state forests (and to a varying degree in private forests) have been loss making, resource depleting, grief causing, ecosystem destroying, quality timber wasting, population enraging, polluting by misuse of chemicals, water mismanaging, fire hazard creating, ridiculous to qualified onlookers at increasing intensity for up to 40 years. Something - many things - must have gone fundamentally wrong for a significant length of time to have ended with such a devastating result today.

One would think that the acknowledgement of this state of affairs is (or should be) the starting point for any forest law revision.

Looking at the latest forest legislation exercise, now before the LegCo, it is clear, however, that such an insightful starting premise has not been adopted.

Nowhere in the environment of the proposed law is there an acknowledgement of failed philosophy, regulation or forestry practice. None of the major players in the industrial forestry environment have expressed a readiness to embrace real change or stepped back from their long held, but clearly disqualified belief systems to make room for real change. On the contrary!

Even at this stage when the indices of mismanagement are crushing, those responsible continue to push for the same, untenable forestry practices, which have led and continue to lead to the sorry state of an entire industry, which in other parts of the world - faced with the same markets, resource limitations and expectations of the population - is prospering without causing ecological, economic and social havoc.

In other words, tinkering with forestry regulations without analyzing the fundamentals, the general direction that should be followed and the overall goal regarding the wellbeing of the whole Tasmanian population, is counterproductive.

It is clear from reading and listening to deliberations at the committee hearings that the majority of participants, with some notable exceptions, are prepared to simply put their claims for a slice of financial support by Governments without questioning the underlying principles.

I understand that MLCs are in the un-enviable position of having to deal with what the Lower House has put on their table. However, going beyond the call of duty, in this case, seems a political necessity.

It is time for a statesman-like stand by the LegCo, demanding a full revision of the forestry legislation and accompanying regulations.

I have no suggestions as to how this can be achieved but I strongly suspect that mechanisms can be found or developed to put the current process on hold and pave the road for a full revision.

What then should a full revision address?

I am not in the position to draft even the beginning of legislation, but I can cite a number of principles that need to be addressed. My points are meant to act as a general guide to indicate the direction such legislation should take. They are neither final nor detailed enough to be taken as a template.

Those working on a revision of the Tasmanian forestry legislation need to recognize and:

- Understand the role of all forests in Tasmania and elsewhere as vital ecosystems of global importance.
- Understand that forests play a far greater role in human lives than just places for timber, fiber or energy production.
- Understand that any grouping of trees of identical age and identical species is not a forest but a crop with all its limitations, dangers of unstable ecosystems, adverse impact on drinking- and environmental water, landscape disfiguration, fire hazard etc.
- Understand that close-to-nature silviculture management is the modern professional call, to be embraced as the first principle and then further developed to suit local forest management needs.
- Understand that forestry regulators cannot also be a for-profit forestry operation – the regulator must be independent and only concerned with regulation for the good of the entire community as well as for forest health.
- Understand that the market is best left to commercial operators who will need to adhere to clear-cut, vigorous regulation and be treated equitably to offer a level playing field and a wise framework for all participants.
- Understand that large operators are likely to be much less efficient than smaller ones.
- Understand that communal forest ownership has proven to be beneficial to forests, timber production and the satisfaction of the population.
- Understand that the use of chemicals in forests should be avoided and serious research as to how to avoid it should be called in.
- Understand that in Tasmania ongoing public education regarding the role of forests and their management should be introduced. It is essential that such education be truthful, comprehensive and never resort to generating spin and secrecy to distort any aspect of forestry.
- Understand that badly managed forests and plantations can and should be subject to restoration management in order to give them more ecological stability, biodiversity and longevity. This may include returning them to agricultural land.
- Understand that some forests should indeed be protected from human interference, but it should be more a matter of quality than quantity. Current crude allocations should be re-examined via fine tuned, comprehensive protection criteria and verification on the ground.
- Understand that all production forests, including plantations, should be managed with utmost care and a genuine triple bottom line as a guideline at all times and all stages.
- Understand that the fertility of the forest ground needs precedence over residue exploitation by large industrial processes such as wood-fired power plants. Promising emerging technologies such as pyrolysis for biochar should be followed closely and their use made mandatory, once research results are satisfactory.

I think you get the drift

There is of course a lot more to be addressed in a serious forestry law revision. But it is essential for a successful forestry policy that the starting point and the general spirit and direction are set in a different philosophical sphere from the one now in force.

By putting this submission to you I also request to present verbal evidence at a committee hearing in the hope of delivering a dose of much needed courage to the LegCo to turn around

the forestry conundrum and make a decisive strategic step towards peace in the Tasmanian forest.

Looking forward to your invitation.

Best regards

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