

PROOF OF EVIDENCE

On behalf of: The Environment Association (TEA) Inc.
PO Box 261 Deloraine 7304

To be submitted to: Forest Practices Tribunal

GPO Box 2036 Hobart 7001

Private Timber Reserve POR 1698 Appeal

Meander Valley Council v. Forest Practices Authority and EE & IC Porter
J & M Hawkes v. Forest Practices Authority and EE & IC Porter
N Hoffmann v. Forest Practices Authority and EE & IC Porter
PA Elkin v. Forest Practices Authority and EE & IC Porter
J Leis v. Forest Practices Authority and EE & IC Porter
J King v. Forest Practices Authority and EE & IC Porter

9 January 2006

Prepared by:

Evelyn DeVito
PO Box 99, Somerset, Tasmania, 7322

Experience: Resident of Preolenna from 1971 to 2003

Effect of plantations in Preolenna III

Effects of plantations in Preolenna and Meunna

Preolenna is a small community 24 kilometres south of Wynyard on the North West Coast of Tasmania. Meunna, a smaller township slightly further to the west, was part of the Preolenna community, and should be included in discussions about the changes to the Preolenna district. Preolenna/Meunna is located in a high rainfall area at and above 300 metres above sea level. Deep red basalt soil produced potatoes, including seed potatoes for most of the country, milk and beef and associated crops for more than 75 years without significant environmental damage. The original settlers cleared the flatter land where myrtle trees grew, knowing that the trees grew only where the topsoil was deep and rich. Significant remnant forest was left following selective logging of the larger trees. Preolenna was originally settled in 1910, and Meunna was established as a soldier settlement following World War 2. While the absolute number of farms in the district has varied as boundaries changed over the years, there has been an average of 20 farms in the district for the 31 years that we lived there. . Preolenna/Meunna has historically been a strong, self-reliant community. The poor roads to the coast limited travel until the 1960s, so community events centred around the primary school, the church, and the hall.

My husband and I moved to Preolenna in 1971; when we left it in 2003, we went without telling the other residents. By that stage we had been residents of the community for far longer than any of our neighbours; the next longest residents moved to the area in 1988. Preolenna had become a very painful place to live; we felt alienated from, and ultimately ostracised by many of our neighbours in what had been a stable, comfortable community. Living in the middle of what had grown into a virtual 45 square kilometre plantation became unbearable. From our home, we could see vast expanses of *E. nitens* in every direction; 20 of the 30 minutes of the drive to Wynyard was through plantations. And as the trees grew taller, the texture of the landscape disappeared, as the roads effectively became tunnels through the trees. The remaining tracts of remnant forest were being clear felled wherever possible, and those areas were also planted with *E. nitens*. But for me, one of the most disturbing aspects was the silence around our home. Living in a farming community for so many years had meant that there was a steady background hum of activities - cows or tractors or people calling in the distance. The only sounds in the vast plantation were the wind and the birds. It was a relief to leave the negative environment. In retrospect the stress and uncertainty, and in some cases hostility surrounding us was unhealthy, and leaving was a start to the healing process.

Trying to talk about the effects of plantation development in Preolenna has been incredibly difficult as what happened there is complex and many layered. After several starts, I've decided to carefully state what I know to be true; either based on my own observations or on those of people I trust. There are references to Patricia English, who with her husband bought a house and 15 acres in Preolenna in 1999, went for an extended tour around Australia, and came back to their dream retirement home to learn that all the land surrounding that home had been sold to Gunns and was soon to be planted in trees. Unfortunately, I have not been able to contact Patricia so that she can tell her own story; she and her husband left Tasmania feeling great

bitterness, and their marriage did not survive. Incidentally, theirs is not the only relationship to fail that I know of after the stress of being surrounded by plantation development. Another couple, the Neisons bought the old Preolenna post office as a retirement home without any knowledge of planned developments, just before work began in that area. Mr. Neison in particular suffered severe stress related medical problems after he realized the situation. The house sold for a 25% loss 7 months later, and the Neisons returned to Western Australia. They separated in less than a year after leaving Preolenna.

It is appropriate to acknowledge the efforts of Forest Enterprises Ltd. to consult with us about the work being done around our boundaries. Face to face interaction with Forest Enterprises staff was always cordial, and we felt that individual workers were giving us as much consideration as they could. The problem was that with the best will in the world, the inherent problems of plantation development cannot be overcome, and neighbours of the plantations are disadvantaged.

To try to keep this reasonably short, I separated the various topics which may be of interest.

1. Loss of farms, housing and infrastructure

SOCIAL ISSUE STATISTICS:

	1995			June 2002		
	Preolenna	Meunna	Total	Preolenna	Meunna	Total
Number of Properties	24	6	30	13	0	13
Vacant Dwellings/Rental	3	0	3	8	0	8
Potential Number of Families	27	6	33	21	0	21

Total loss of 187 jobs in 5 years from district:

1 dairy farm job supports 7 jobs downstream

”From Preolenna/Meunna 26 dairying jobs have gone plus 5 potential jobs (min.) from vacant properties.

Gross calculations on estimated income:

Plantation 200 hectares

\$5100 a hectare at harvest in 30 years: **\$1,020,000**

Dairy farm 200 hectares

\$850 a cow p.a. from 300 cows (1.5 p.h.) over 30 years: **\$7,650,000**

Dairy farm 200 hectares with intensive pasture management and inputs

\$850 a cow p.a. from 500 cows (2.5 p.h.) over 30 years: **\$12,750,000**

The annual income to the local Waratah/Wynyard economy foregone with the destruction of dairy farms in this local area alone is approximately \$4.1M

In 1995 there were 16 major dairy, cropping and grazing properties in Preolenna/Meunna, by 2001 this number will be reduced to NIL.”

These statistics were gathered by Colleen Dibley, resident of Preolenna, in the year 2000. The financial information was collected by her from the local farmers before they left the district. Further information can be found at Colleen's website <http://members.iinet.net.au/~cdibley/>.

After these statistics were collected, two further houses were lost; one owned by Gunns was demolished due to its dilapidated state, the second was burnt down by someone brought into the district by the plantations. Since the plantations were developed in Meunna, and all but 2 houses removed from there, both Aurora and Telstra lines have been removed beyond one of the Meunna residences. A Telstra mobile phone tower was also removed from Meunna. The removal of the houses also had another unforeseen outcome. When our telephone stopped working it took a technician several hours to find our home at 1036 Meunna Road. Meunna Road runs for more than 30 kilometres and ours was the only house left on it; the technician had no way of knowing which end of the road we were located on, and there was no one to ask in the maze of unpaved roads through plantations. The removal of the phone tower meant that he was unable to use his mobile phone to check directions.

The removal of houses began in Meunna in 1995, as plantations slowly spread, until 3 of the original 9 houses were left. One of those houses was vandalised and looted when the owner virtually walked away in despair after selling the property to Forest Enterprises in August 2000; pictures of the ruined house were printed in the Mercury Newspaper on August 20, 2000. A total of 7 houses were removed from Preolenna itself as the plantations spread, but community concern about loss of infrastructure saw an end to this practice in 2000. A total of 23 houses remain in the area: 6 rental properties in Preolenna belong to forestry companies, one house belongs to and rented out by Housing Tasmania and two small commercial orchards. The remaining houses are on smallholdings, scattered through the trees; there are no commercial farms. All the dairies were removed, as were many of the sheds. Kilometres of fencing, much of it wallaby-proof, were rolled up and taken away.

2. Problems with spray, control of “vermin” and weeds

During consultation with Forest Enterprises before plantation development began, we were assured of advance notification of spraying, which would be done in such a manner as to ensure that our water tanks and dam would not be contaminated. Pre-spray water testing of our dam and tanks in September by both Forest Enterprises on September 6, 2000 and Public and Environmental Health, Department of Health and Human Services on September 21, 2000 showed no contamination of our water. To the best of my knowledge no further water testing was done in Preolenna. On September 26, 2000 a very strong, gusty northeasterly was blowing. We received a call from a Forest Enterprises employee to say that pre-planting ground spraying would begin on that day. When we could see the spray blowing and smell the chemical, I rang the Spray Complaint Unit of DPIWE. I was told that the contractor would be contacted and advised that there was a problem with spray drift. The spraying however continued until midafternoon when the entire length of the property to the north of us was completed. On September 29th, Patricia English and I met a

spraying contractor employed by Gunns who was living on Gunns land in a caravan keeping meteorological records for his own work. When we told him of the incident, he checked his diary and found that he had recorded a wind speed of 22 mph for that morning, when the Code of Practice says that spraying should not occur when the wind is more than 15 kmp/h. After complaints to Forest Enterprises over the event, and the raising of the incident in Parliament, the company was very careful to keep us fully informed of their spraying plans – and giving us a wind speed reading each time. Due to the drop in fortunes of Forest Enterprises in mid 2001, virtually no further spraying occurred in our end of the valley.

Patricia English lived 3 kilometres away, on a 15-acre block surrounded by Gunns property. Patricia had long-standing severe chemical allergies and had been given medical advice to avoid any contact with the herbicides to be sprayed around her home. She explained this to the Gunns supervisor and was assured of at least 24 hours notice to vacate before any spray was applied near her home. On September 7th, both Gunns and Forest Enterprises used ground spray near the English's home, and she complained vigorously about having no advance warning. On October 4, 2000, she was called at 9:00am and told that spraying would begin in the paddock next to her house in 10 minutes, and that she should leave immediately. On two other occasions, she was visiting neighbours when unannounced spraying commenced nearby causing her great distress.

The laying of 1080 initially caused an immediate large drop in the number of wallabies in our area. The number of animals rebounded within the next year, and wallaby damage to garden areas, and over-grazing occurred on any remaining grass. Wallaby droppings made it difficult to walk in effected areas and presented a potential health hazard; for the first time in 29 years of residence, it was necessary to fence wallabies out of the garden. Possums on the other hand, which had been an occasional garden problem, totally disappeared and had not reappeared by the time we left in November 2003.

Weeds in Preolenna/Meunna are a serious and spreading problem. In some cases, weed seed, particularly thistle was apparently introduced on machinery during the ploughing process; thistle down, in autumn blows like snow in some sections of district. Other weeds which were already present, but kept under control by the resident farmers are spreading. Gorse was very rare in Preolenna for most of the time we lived there. There are now large patches spreading unhindered. The weed problem is exacerbated by the fact that the forestry companies are in fact absentee landowners and maintenance is ordered from a distance, not in recognition of local conditions. I have seen well-developed thistle plants slashed and left to spread their seed, where an earlier slashing would have prevented further seeding.

3. Increase in crime

Up to 2000, when the forestry companies took possession of properties, the property vendor was obliged to remove houses and sheds as the companies bought only the land. The removals were large jobs, and obviously the work was done over a period of time. Building materials and assets such as fencing, gates, water pumps, begin to disappear. It became evident that Preolenna/Meunna was seen as easy pickings as there were large areas with no residents to see what was happening. The issue of

crime came to a head when an empty house owned by Forest Enterprises began to be systematically looted. It was isolated, but located on a hill, so lights could be seen in and around the house. Over a series of nights it was systematically stripped, the removal of recently installed kitchen cabinets was interrupted only when the new owner started camping in the house prior to moving in. Tasmania Police were asked by the residents of Preolenna to organize a meeting to set up a neighbourhood watch program. At that meeting it was stated that there had been 11 crimes reported in Preolenna between January 2000 and September 2000, historically only 2 – 3 crimes were reported for the area annually. I have not been able to find the crime statistics, but from memory, there were at least 21 by the end of the year. That trend continued on into 2001, after which statistics became unobtainable.

For several months the house nearest ours was rented to a man who was reputed to be one of the largest drug dealers on the North West Coast. While he was a resident, there certainly was a large increase in the traffic into Preolenna, and an increase in roadside litter. There were also persistent stories about marijuana crops inside the plantations, which I am unable to confirm, but do believe to be true.

Shooters became a problem though neither of the plantation companies or Forestry Tasmania, which have large tracts on the southern side of Preolenna, permitted shooting. It was not unusual to hear shots and see spotlights moving through the plantations, but the police response time from Wynyard meant that the shooters had moved on before the police arrived. In one particular case shots were fired from a moving vehicle driving on the road in front of our home.

Littering became more and more of a problem along the road from Wynyard and Preolenna as well as the minor side roads. Of particular concern was the number of alcohol containers to be found at frequent intervals indicating alcohol being consumed in vehicles travelling on a narrow winding road. Another problem was the dumping of anything from car bodies to household garbage in the plantations. While boom gates in some cases have stopped the practice, unobstructed roads are vulnerable. In one area at the south end of Coal Mine Road, Waratah-Wynyard Council went to great effort to clean up an informal tip. Within a short time, garbage, including disposable nappies was being dumped again.

Unauthorized use of plantation roads and fire breaks, when clear, by motor cycles, quad bikes, and other vehicles is a problem that both Gunns and Forest Enterprises tried to control without success.

Arson was responsible for the loss of a house to fire. The person responsible for the fire was a juvenile at the time and resided in the house bought by Housing Tasmania from the Englishes, the sale is described later under the heading of devaluation of properties. ***For legal reasons, this section may need to be removed from the document if it is passed on. It would be best to get legal opinion on using the information as it concerns a juvenile. The incident is important though as it demonstrates some of the consequences of ad hoc planning. The youth involved had a recognized history of arson, and housing he and his family in the middle of a highly flammable plantation by the Government was recognized as folly by the solicitor who handled the sale for the Englishes. The youth in question has since resolved his problems and is no longer a threat, but the people who facilitated the***

family's move into Preolenna had no way of knowing that that would be the final outcome. Pat English and I believe that the sale and move were to solve two public relations problems for the State Government.

4. Fire risk

Fire risk, a growing plantation concern, has been featured in the newspapers for the last couple of summers. For us in Preolenna, it meant, and means for the remaining residents a very real threat. Four or five metre firebreaks (the width depends on the company and its particular policy) around the perimeter of a plantation are virtually meaningless given the height to which the trees grow. The plantation perimeters around us were meant to be kept clear, but the reality was that they were often covered in waist to shoulder height weeds and mowed once a year, usually in late summer. Evacuation in the event of a wild fire from the area would be very difficult as the only roads out are through plantations. There are few open spaces where people gather away from flames. As well as that, most of the dams in Meunna were purposely breached during plantation development there, making water generally unavailable, and locked gates on many of the forestry access roads around Preolenna make access for fire fighters difficult if not impossible.

5. Property devaluation

Loss of property values presented difficulties for those who wanted to leave Preolenna. The Neisons took a considerable loss, and hoped that there would be compensation sometime in the future. The Englishes put their home on the market shortly after work began around them while Patricia continued to act as a strong and credible spokesperson drawing attention to the problems of people surrounded by plantations. They were given a letter by their local estate agent documenting a \$30,000 devaluation of their 15-acre block. While there was some buyer interest in the property, no one was willing to pay the sum the Englishes needed to enable them to move back to the mainland. Suddenly, in January 2001, Housing Tasmania bought the property and used it to provide housing “to relocate a family away from their lead – contaminated home near Queenstown”. The circumstances of the sale were finally reported in the Mercury newspaper in May 2001. Other properties were put on the market and remained unsold for long periods of time, but I don't know enough about the circumstances to comment further. In our own case, we were only able to sell at a price enabling us to move on during the real estate boom of 2003. We consider ourselves to be very lucky.

6. The Preolenna myth

This is the most difficult area to approach, and the most important as Preolenna continues to be used by the timber industry lobby as a wonderful example of forestry uniting and building a community. Those of us using Preolenna as an example of plantation excess and questioning the wisdom of such vast tracts of land being turned into single species industrial plantations have been successful in putting the issue into the public arena. The forestry companies have never contradicted our statements, and in fact are unable to as they are true. When other communities express concern about proposed local plantation development, Preolenna is cited as an example of the

positive effects of the forestry industry on a community. One of the facts that have been lost in this version of the Preolenna story is that Preolenna has always been a strong socially self-sufficient community with a long history of community events and celebrations. The Preolenna Primary School, the church and the Community Centre were the venues for numerous activities over the years, some of them annual events like the Sunday School Anniversary, school Christmas break-up, Bonfire Night, and Producers' Society pre-milking dinner and various socials. The Parents and Friends Association and the original Preolenna Mothers Club were very actively involved with the school and the community until the school was closed in 1993; school socials and performances were attended by most of the community, including those who now longer had children attending the school. Residents built the Community Centre and raised funds for equipment and furnishings. Fund raising projects such as local Scrabble players pitching in a small donation each time they met to purchase a barbecue for the centre were a regular part of the community. Friday night was traditionally games night at the hall with participation rising and falling with changes in season and residents. The Rural Youth Club of Tasmania which now hosts Agfest originated in Preolenna with the formation of the Preolenna Calf Club in 1932. For a period in the 70s and 80s Preolenna hosted annual balls as part of the ball circuit on the North West Coast. And as in any community, there were parties for children and for adults to celebrate the usual occasions. The other fact omitted from the debate is that forestry has not provided any permanent employment in the district; gangs arrive, work in the plantations, and leave again. Up until the time we left, one forestry worker was a tenant in Preolenna for a short period and a local truck driver sometimes drove log trucks. The one forestry contractor who lives in Preolenna has had his home on the market for more than a year.

It is difficult for me as an outsider to pinpoint just when the forestry lobby became involved because individual residents began the campaign to promote the community of Preolenna. How much or little of this was instigated by company employees, I can only surmise. What follows is an abbreviated account of the transformation of Preolenna into its icon status as a timber town.

When the final cascade of farms sales occurred (seven farms were bought by Gunns or Forest Enterprises in one week in March 2000), there were rumours of the closure and sale of the community centre. The remaining residents, not yet polarized, felt strongly about maintaining the sense of community which had made Preolenna such a great place to live. A new hall committee meeting was organized, and office holders elected to replace all those leaving the community. Friday night get togethers at the hall, which had happened on and off over the years were restarted, and proved popular.

Colleen Dibley began speaking out in the media about plantation development in the area in 1998, when development started in the northern end of the valley. Patricia English and I became involved in the protests in March 2000, when we realized the ramifications of what was to happen around us. We were careful to direct our criticisms at the decision makers in government, and steer clear of any criticism of local people. Many articles were written about plantation development in the district in the Tasmanian newspapers, politicians visited the area, many letters were written to state and local government, but the community continued to gather on Friday nights, carefully avoiding the subject of the trees.

In August 2000, a resident, Mrs. Anne Hird wrote a letter to Gunns commending Gunns dealings with the Hirds, and this letter directly contradicting many of our earlier objections, was forwarded to the Waratah-Wynyard Council. At that stage, it became evident that individual residents were being treated differently. According to Patricia English, Gunns representatives would only talk to or negotiate with a single household at a time. She was told that everyone else in Preolenna was happy about the trees, so she should not complain. As we were the only people owning land adjacent to Forest Enterprises holdings, we could not be part of a group negotiation; Gunns would not talk to us, as we were not direct neighbours. Friday nights at the community centre became a bit more strained and this state continued through the filming of Preolenna by the ABC Landline program on plantation spread that was screened on October 1, 2001.

On September 26, 2000, a meeting was called to explore the possibilities of holding a Preolenna Tree Festival in March of 2001, to be sponsored by Gunns and Forest Enterprises. The festival would “ show a community living in harmony with their surroundings” as well as to raise money. I attended the meeting and fully endorsed the idea of a community festival, but not one sponsored by the forestry companies which could be used as a way of selling plantation development to the wider community. Considering that Preolenna is the home of Rural Youth, which has gone on to so successfully stage Agfest, there were many other possible themes. Finally, I left the meeting as my arguments were futile, saying that I would love to be involved in any community activity, as long as it was not seen to endorse tree farming. The general feeling of the group was that as the trees were already in Preolenna, so that sponsorship and publicity did not matter. The group could not see that it would appear to be promoting the planting of trees in other districts. A couple of days after the meeting, two of the organizers appeared at my home, and offered me a chance to sign a document supporting the festival to raise money for the community, sponsored by the forestry companies. All the residents of Preolenna were listed on the paper, with signatures next to their names. I did sign, with a note next to my name objecting to sponsorship from the timber industry. The Englishes refused to sign the document, and it was never offered to the Dibleys. When I later asked some of the other residents who I know were unhappy about the plantation about their signatures, they said that they felt intimidated by the two organizers, but saw no harm in signing.

From there on, trees became a very sore subject. The controversy flared on the ABC Radio Country Hour in mid October 2000 following the release of the much-heralded Good Neighbour Policy. Philip Ridyard, Public Affairs Manager for Forest Enterprises waded into the argument on air after the mention of Preolenna and said words to the effect that a small but volatile interest group of life stylers from the mainland were responsible for the furore, and that a straw poll in Preolenna showed that 36 people were pro-forestry, and that 6 people were against it. The only thing resembling a straw poll was the document of support for a community festival referred to earlier. In November, at a public meeting at the Burnie Civic Centre, Mr Ridyard said that he had been to Preolenna and talked to the community and that they were sick and tired of troublemakers and wanted the three families opposed to plantations to leave. Relations became more difficult, and after some unpleasantness at a Friday night at the hall, we stopped attending. At this point the community became polarized into the pro-plantation minority, the anti-plantation minority, and

the majority who were not happy about plantations but felt that there was nothing they could do and they just wanted to get on with life and their neighbours.

The first Preolenna festival was held in March 2001 with sponsorship from Gunns and Forest Enterprises; the word tree was dropped from the title. Later in the year articles began to appear in the media with titles such as “Community Spirit Alive at Preolenna”, and “Preolenna’s Death Notices Premature”. There is an implication in these articles that Preolenna had lacked community activities before the coming of the plantations when in fact it has a rich history of social involvement. By November, Barry Chipman began to refer to Preolenna as a great timber community in the newspapers, and in late November, The Preolenna Mothers Group officially joined Timber Communities Australia as a means of dealing with public liability insurance difficulties. The Preolenna good news stories continued to run in papers around the state. We no longer received copies of the community newsletter.

When the Australian Senate announced an inquiry into plantation forestry in 2002, I made a submission to the inquiry and offered to guide a tour through Preolenna to demonstrate the points made in my submission. I later learned that the Preolenna Mothers Club also invited the Senators to visit Preolenna for a community reception. The Senators, or at least some of them visited the area twice in one day. A controversy erupted over the community reception, when Alistair Graham asserted that not all the people at the reception were in fact residents. I can’t answer that as I was not notified about the event and did not attend.

In 2003, the Preolenna Mothers Group of Timber Communities Australia formally leased the Preolenna Community Centre from the Waratah-Wynyard Council, with all of its assets, for \$1 a year. I believe that the community consultation that led to this was seriously flawed, but objections were unsuccessful. The community chose the option of the leasing by the Preolenna Mothers Group of Timber Communities Australia at a meeting of which I had no knowledge until I received an account of it from the Waratah-Wynyard Council. Once again, talking to other residents who I know were unhappy about the events felt that they could not speak out at the risk of being ostracised by the small, strongly motivated core group. At this point, we moved from Preolenna with no regrets.

Evelyn DeVito

PO Box 99

Somerset, Tas, 7322

(03) 64350089

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