



11<sup>th</sup> January 2013

Mr Simon Wright  
Committee Secretary  
Legislative Council  
Parliament House  
**HOBART TAS 7000**

Dear Committee Secretary,

**SUBMISSION TO SELECT COMMITTEE – TASMANIAN FORESTS AGREEMENT**

I write to you as the owner and director of a fourth generation logging business in the Huon Valley. Our business currently employs 15 people and supports many families as a direct result of our operations in the southern forests.

Our current business was re-structured in 2003 as a result of the retirement of my brother and is now operated by my two sons – both in their early thirties and myself.

I have worked in the forestry industry for over 50 years, and consider myself and my business a significant stakeholder in the forest industries debate – something that to this point has not been recognised. Over the years we have been a major producer of speciality timbers, and I find it offensive that our knowledge and experience in the debate has not been sought or taken into account at any time.

Over the years, and with several millions of dollars worth of investment, we have built our business up to what it is today, and I consider our business to be a leader in the contracting force.

I have an extensive understanding of the areas which are contained within the agreement, some of which have been harvested in the past by my forefathers and I would not consider as “high conservation value” forests in the definition of “untouched”. Our past forest practices have been world class that it is a credit to the industry to have forests that have been harvested to be considered worthy of reservation under this agreement.

Our operation is subject to frequent visits by organisations such as Still Wild Still Threatened and the Huon Valley Environment Centre. These groups will enter the operations with no regard for OH&S issues and when asked to leave they refuse and will continue to block operations. They will also lock-on to machinery preventing work from occurring. I have reviewed the IGA document many times and cannot find in the agreement where it refers to “peace in the forests” and the curbing of this illegal entry and activity. Huon Valley Environment Centre have already gone on the public record to say they are not a signatory and therefore they will not be stopping their protest actions.

There are several points in which I wish to raise with the Select Committee to consider in their deliberations and they are as follows;

1. There has been no (or very little) information as far as we are concerned, other than meetings that have been called by Timber Communities Australia, and of which were lacking in detail and specific information that shows the full impact this decision will have on our business. The lack of detailed maps just adds to the confusion and as we have seen in the past, boundaries get changed to suit the agenda of the day. In my view this is totally unsatisfactory for all concerned when we are dealing with such an important issue that impacts on so many lives.
2. There seems to be no meaning to the word "durability" and after checking with our company solicitor on the legal meaning of the word, his comment was "that this has very little meaning and is open ended." This is something we do not need with this agreement. We have seen so many agreements in the past which were supposedly designed to move the industry forward, but yet we just seem to be reinventing the wheel again and again. And each times the industry is the one that has to give. Using "Claytons" words - durability has very little substance.
3. With the introduction of the new OH&S legislation in regards to small and larger businesses and the substantial increase in penalties, this should also include unauthorised visitors, protesters and the like.
4. It is my view that penalties for the illegal activities of protesters should be reviewed and incorporated in this so called forest peace deal if it was to proceed. Not only should the penalties be increased for undertaking such blatant and illegal activities which stop hard working employees from not only providing for families and the wider community in which they live, but it also should incorporate a "user pay's" system whereby any use of emergency services to remove the illegal protesters should be recovered from either the individuals or the organisation for which they represent. It would also be appropriate to consider a penalty whereby contractors had a legal right to recover lost earnings and costs incurred as a direct result of this illegal activity.
5. In the Mercury on Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> December 2012, Jenny Weber was quoted as saying that the protests would continue and was advertising a "January Justice" event calling for participants in their workshops. These groups have no intention of abiding by the "so called" peace deal, and I believe penalties should be increased to (at a minimum) of the new OH&S legislation that came into effect as of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2013 to discouraged this illegal activity.
6. In regards to the Federal funding being offered for this agreement, consideration should be given contractors and sawmillers who are intending to remain in the "restructured" forest industry to upgrade their equipment to address the changes required provided the recipients were prepared to sign a document to say that they will remain in the industry for the duration of their contracts or a minimum of 5 years to be eligible for such a grant. I consider a portion of the money would be far better spend to help these industry people remain viable rather than be wasted on new "so called" reserves when over 40% of Tasmania is already in reserves. Many of the contractors and sawmillers have suffered significant financial losses due to the on-going uncertainty being placed on them and the considerable financial burdens they continue to face on a day to day basis. A proportion of the funds being directed to help these industry people would be a huge benefit to not only

individual businesses, but the industry and community alike.

7. Consideration should be given to re-open the Triabunna export facility to cater for the sawmill residue and it would help the sawmillers move stock and make their facilities safer and viable.

We have all seen how Tasmania's economy is suffering at the hands of the environmentalists and the reduction of forestry. This deal, whilst I agree something needs to happen, completely misses the point of the "so called" peace in the forests.

I would ask that you, as Legislative Councillors consider the 'bigger picture' and ensure that the concerns I have raised are addressed with the importance they require and that the individuals and organisations responsible for such activities are held legally accountable. Until this is resolved, there will be no peace in the forests and we will be seeing more of the same.

I can be contacted anytime on 0428 123 684 to discuss further and extend an invitation to you to visit our worksite at any time.

Kind regards

Tony Bennett  
**Director – TP Bennett and Sons**