

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

Dear Committee members,

I am writing as a forest conservation biologist with twenty years experience working in Tasmania's forests, as well as substantial international experience relating to world best practice for ecological forestry. This includes being awarded Australia's 2012 Fulbright postdoctoral scholarship to conduct research in Washington, USA, and a one-year fellowship at the World Forest Institute in Portland in 2010. These fellowships enabled me to conduct both social research and field-based biodiversity research into ecologically sustainable forestry practices, including investigating approaches to conflict resolution between the timber industry and environmental groups in both the USA and Canada. It may seem surprising since biased media reporting paints a picture of terrible forest management, but based on my international experience, I consider Tasmania to have some of the world's best forest management practices. This is not to say there is not room for improvement, and I see research leading continuously to positive changes. If managed appropriately, the TFA can be a part of this improvement, but if managed poorly, it could lead to perverse and negative outcomes for biodiversity.

When the negotiations leading to the TFA were first announced in 2010, I was dismayed at the approach being taken, since successful Canadian models had involved conservation scientists as key players from the outset. I felt this would be essential to a sensible and lasting outcome. We can not turn back the clock and start the process over, but I do believe that to achieve useful conservation benefits, it is not too late to revise the approach taken to reservation and conservation for the Tasmanian Forest Agreement. For the process to be successful politically, it seems necessary that the reduced timber quotas agreed to by the parties should be honoured. However, I have some suggestions about how revision to the approach to conservation could have substantial benefits ecologically.

Current international thinking about how to achieve ecologically sustainable forestry emphasises conservation at multiple spatial scales, and incorporates conservation thinking into all aspects of forestry. This approach contrasts greatly from the old-fashioned model that relies on reserves to protect biodiversity, with little expectation for conservation outcomes from those areas available for management. Unfortunately this model appears to underpin the TFA outcomes. Worse still, a rigorous and objective approach was not taken to identify those areas of highest conservation values. I suggest an approach that considers the 165,000 m³ of forest that will not be harvested annually as 'conservation units' that can be allocated amongst the following strategies to result in a balanced conservation outcome:

1. Tasmanian environmentalists talk of the 'high conservation value' of areas they want to save. However, because of good forestry practices, almost any patch of native forest could be designated as having such values - ironically this is a testament to a good forest practices system. I think it needs to be recognised that, more than conservation value, it is the intrinsic value (e.g. beauty, spiritual value, sense of wilderness, etc) of the forest that many environmentalists really want to protect, and they use conservation arguments for political reasons. Hence, for the TGA to be successful, it should **protect in permanent reserves some additional areas of highest intrinsic value**, even if they are of relatively low conservation value. Tall, wet forests are a good example, since they are already very well represented in reserves, yet their beauty captures the public's imagination.
2. Because the additional TFA reserve areas were drawn up by environmentalists (Point 1), they do not represent forest areas of actual greatest conservation significance. A state-wide assessment should be conducted to do this objectively. Ideally this would be done across all land tenures even though areas of additional reserves would most likely come from State forest. The TFA should then **protect in**

permanent reserves some additional areas of highest conservation value, even if they are of relatively low intrinsic value.

3. Conservation needs to be considered at multiple spatial scales. This includes a Comprehensive, Adequate, Representative and Replicated (CARR) network of permanent reserves (Point 2). But it is much more than that. Both international and Tasmanian research is showing the benefit of retention within (e.g. retention forestry), and near to, harvest areas for allowing species to persist in the managed forest, and re-establish in harvested areas when conditions become suitable. Landscape connectivity is also important, requiring reservation at intermediate scales. The current TFA model is likely to result in a situation where intensive management will be essential to meet timber quotas, and additional local- and medium-scale reservation is not possible. Such reserves are usually informal reserves and often very small, yet they are just as important to conservation outcomes as is the large permanent reserve network. The TFA should encourage **additional informal reservation at local and medium-scales, at the expense of a proportion of the area allocated to large permanent reserves**.
4. As mentioned in Point 3, the current TFA model is likely to lead to intensified management on areas available for timber production. This will involve shortened rotation lengths, and intensified management with practices such as thinning which involve more frequent management intervention. Wet eucalypt forests might be logged every 40 years with thinning in between, rather than according to the policy of an 80-100 year rotation. This intensive harvesting means there is more frequent soil disturbance, and forests are not allowed to follow their natural successional pathway where different species of plants and animals become established as the forest ages. Rather than decreasing the rotation, the TFA **should reduce the total area allocated to reserves to allow the rotation length between harvests to be increased** in some cases.

In summary, rather than the TFA focus on permanent reservation of areas of high intrinsic value to environmental groups, I suggest a revised process which spreads the 'conservation units' among the four strategies proposed above.

Finally, although not related to the TFA, I cannot help myself from urging the government to take measures to better protect and conserve those ecosystem types that are currently not well enough protected, and where the benefits from additional protection would be of orders of magnitude greater. With forestry, it is really a case of the law of diminishing returns, and I find it incredibly frustrating when other ecosystems like grasslands, heathlands, grassy woodlands and estuarine and marine environments are neglected. Less than 1% of Tasmania's marine ecosystem is in no-take marine reserves. This is appalling when compared to the levels of forest reservation. Just because the public and environmental groups focus on forests does not justify the government ignoring the ecosystems that are in greatest peril.

Yours faithfully,

Dr Susan Baker,



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