



Submission to the Legislative Council Select Committee into the Tasmanian Forest Agreement Bill 2012

17/01/2013

The National Timber Councils Association is an incorporated local government association representing the interests of member municipal regional councils in relation to forestry on both public and private land. The Association's primary function is to provide a forum for local government to address the management of forests and forest industries and their impact on local communities.

Recommendations

The National Timber Councils Association requests on behalf of its members:

- that a comprehensive socio-economic study of the impact be undertaken to measure the effect of the Tasmanian Forest Agreement on both the Tasmanian economy, regional economies, and local government in the affected regional areas,
- certainty that there will no longer be any forest protests as a result of this legislation, and that a peace accord is maintained between industry and all environmental groups,
- provision of enforceable methods of stopping illegal protests at legitimate forest harvesting sites,
- investigation into the effect this legislation will have on management of the Tasmanian forest estate, and how this will affect fire management and fire mitigation strategies,
- assurance that funds will be allocated to the regional communities that are likely to suffer from the IGA process.

Context

1. Lack of policy balance

The National Timber Councils Association (NTCA) is supportive of well-balanced legislation which recognises the social and economic needs of society along with environmental needs in the creation of sustainable policy. Policy such as this requires strong consultation from the wider community. This means that not just environmental interest groups and the forest industry organisations should be involved, but community representatives from the regions should also be consulted on the changes that will affect them.

It is unclear why local government was not given any specific mechanism to provide input into the creation of the Tasmanian Forest Agreement and this issue is compounded by the lack of wider community consultation in the process. Councils are area-based, representative governments with a legislative and electoral mandate to manage local issues and plan for the community's needs. Involvement from regional councils would have been well suited to play a part in the creation of the Tasmanian Forest Agreement, and would have provided valuable insight into the socio-economic requirements of regional Tasmania.

For this reason the NTCA doubts that the Tasmanian Forest Agreement Bill in its current form contains an appropriate balance of social, economic and environmental considerations.

2. No guarantee of peace

It is also of great concern that the Tasmanian Forest Agreement will not protect regional forestry activities from continued protests by non-signatory environmental groups. Individuals of environmental groups may hold memberships in both signatory and non-signatory environmental groups. The Wilderness Society has recently stated that it is not the job of the signatory environmental groups to restrict protests of other environmental groups.

There appears to be no genuine commitment to implement the rhetoric contained in the Agreement.

3. Detrimental economic impact

For the financial year 2010/11, more than \$2.7 million was paid by Forestry Tasmania to Tasmanian councils. Retraction of business will see decreased amounts of money to local government, which will further impact the regional and rural communities through reduction of council services. Furthermore as forestry activity decreases, forestry roads will be passed over to the care of local government, who are ill equipped to maintain an increased road network as their rate base diminishes. These roads are also important to tourism and recreation; however the funds will not be there for these services.

In addition, Australia's current forest and wood products trade deficit is approximately \$1.9 billion. Policy actions such as this one will increase both this deficit and diminish Australia's



competitiveness against other timber export countries who may not manage their natural resources as efficiently and sustainably as Australia.

4. Heightened emergency management concerns

It is also a concern that any reduction in the active management of forests will increase future fire danger for Tasmania. Forestry provides well maintained roads to assist fire services in accessing the forest; they manage the fuel loads of surrounding forests to protect their investment, provide machinery and expertise to assist fire fighting, and supply staff to fight fires when a fire event occurs. A reduction in staff and management would surely affect the collective ability to mitigate and fight fire threats.

5. Poor policy precedent for regional Australia

The National Timber Councils Association is also concerned about the dangerous precedent this legislation may set for application in other rural and regional locations around Australia, not only for Forestry but also other natural resource management industries. Actions such as these have the capacity to significantly diminish the economic and social fabric of regional Australia while undermining resource security.

The implications arising from this policy as outlined in the Tasmanian Forest Agreement 2012 is unclear, and this along with the information provided above forms the basis for our five recommendations.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Malcolm Hole", is written over a light grey rectangular background.

Cr Malcolm Hole
NTCA President

Contact

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