

Submission to Legislative Council Select Committee on the Tasmanian Forest Agreement Bill 2010

I believe that the best way forward, for all Tasmanians, is to support the Tasmanian Forest Agreement (TFA) 2012 in its current form. The Union want it, Industry want it and the Conservation movement want it. Over the past two and a half years negotiations between unions, environment groups and the timber industry have resulted in the TFA. The agreement has involved compromise on all sides and it is a credit to the representatives of the seven Industry and four Environment groups that these talks have continued until a negotiated outcome was reached and signed by all eleven groups.

During this time forests for protection have been independently verified as having high conservation values. Contractors have, and will continue to have, an opportunity to apply for voluntary exit packages and a sustainable annual high quality saw log quota has been negotiated which guarantees saw millers who wish to remain in the industry their agreed quota for the next 15 years. Speciality Timber production zones for our craft industry have been identified as well as access to speciality timbers from within logging coupes.

The TFA supports a re-structure of our forestry industry, including support for workers and communities. Over the last few years the downturn in the export woodchip market has resulted in upheaval within the forest industry and the fact that industry and environmentalists have worked together for a solution is historic. As part of the TFA, signatories have committed to work co-operatively to develop and implement agreed solutions and the TFA provides for a Signatory Council to be formally established to oversee initial implementation and durability of the agreement. Conservation Groups have put their names to this agreement in good faith, guaranteeing durability, for the TFA in its current form. After 2 years the Signatory Council will be replaced by Stakeholder Council to ensuring ongoing durability of the agreement. Funding for this is outlined in the TFA funding schedule.

The TFA provides \$276 (+ I understand a further \$60 million) for the restructure and diversification of the public native forest industry and an additional \$100 million will be available for regional development.

Over the past decade the North East region has experienced a massive decline in manufacturing with the loss of the UMT milk processing factory, Simplot Vegetable processing, Auspine and French Pine Mills and the current downturn in forestry. In 2011 a signatory group made up of the Dorset Council, Tasmanian Government, Legislative Council (Apsley Member), Greens, Utas, Regional Development Tas., NE Chamber of Commerce, Dorset Economic Group, Dept. of Economic Development, Tourism and the Arts and the Social Inclusion Commissioner supported the Northeast Working Group – Priority Initiatives Paper. Outlined in this paper is a long-term sustainable direction for the North East region. Through consultation with the community the NE Working Group was provided with almost 100 concept proposals for consideration. Many of the concepts detailed in the NE Working Group paper fit with the Regional Development funding....many of the concepts provided by the community could become reality. These concepts range from weed eradication projects, walking tracks, health and wellbeing projects, upgrading of current tourism infrastructure, seed export, and diversified forest product value adding (e.g. prefabrication and flat pack facility, oriented strand board mill and constructed insulated panels). Submissions to the Regional Development Funding aspect of the TFA will provide jobs and training throughout the region. For example, I have a submission ready to go for a “track and training” package for the northeast – along the lines of the Bridport Walking Track which has been a huge success for the area... providing employment for 20 participants for 40 weeks – including training and certificates (e.g. OH&S., chain saw, First Aid and Land Management and Conservation) at the end of the period, not to mention a fantastic asset for the area. This project will require just 1% of the total Regional Development Funding. As a result of such a training package participants in the Bridport Walking Track project were motivated to enter the workforce – some for the first time. I believe such projects have a huge social benefit to local communities.

In the far northeast an informal, guided, extended bushwalk takes participants on a 7 day adventure throughout the region, highlighting the beauty of the northeast – considered Tasmania’s ”forgotten corner” in the eco-tourism field. This diverse walk (the Northeast Highlands Track) is a proposed 7-day bushwalk from Mt. Victoria to the Blue Tier has the unique benefit that it can be vehicle assisted...there is no such extended walk in Tasmania and the opportunities are endless...another possible Regional Development Project! (concept already supported by Tas. Expeditions). Worldwide, Tasmania is considered a safe, beautiful, pristine environment for such eco-tourism activities as bushwalking, mountain bike riding etc.

In Pyengana, (I am a fourth generation local) farmers have successfully diversified into alternative markets. Anchor Organics, Pyengana Dairy Company / Holy Cow Café and Pyengana Premium Meats. Local tourism businesses – Holy Cow Café and the famous Pub in the Paddock state that ~60% of their business comes from tourists – visiting St. Columba Falls. Highlighting such magnificent natural features brings visitors from far and wide – spending their money locally and supporting employment in the area. There are many other such treasures throughout the northeast making it an area with huge tourism potential due to our fantastic produce and natural environment.

I have heard comments such as: “it is all about trees, not people”. Regarding this, I believe that the eco-system values of the native forests are being largely ignored. Intact native forests freely provide an irreplaceable service to all living creatures...Forests are a vital part of the water cycle, regulating and maintaining flow and ensuring the quality and quantity of fresh water. At a time when water is such a precious resource, protecting the forests in our catchments is urgent. The proposed reserves in northeast Tasmania (amalgamating the Mt. Cameron, Blue Tier, Star of Peace, Mt Victoria and Mt Maurice reserves) would protect the headwaters and upper catchments of most (almost all) of the northeast’s major river systems. Native forests store vast amounts of carbon as well as taking in carbon from the atmosphere and releasing oxygen in return. The Northeast Reserve proposal will seek to end fragmentation of the forests throughout the region, protecting water catchments, connecting habitats and ensuring diversity.

Regarding Private Forests – these have not been included in the current agreement as private landowners make their own decisions about how their forests are managed. Possibly a similar Agreement could be reached between relevant stakeholders – identifying private forests which would be available for harvesting and areas for protection – such as water catchments / threatened species habitat – in line with the Forest Practice Code and Environmental Protection Board standards.

Throughout the Northeast of Tasmania vast areas are still available for timber production and a viable timber industry is ensured by the TFA. To say that 40% of Tasmania is locked up in reserves does nothing for the environment of the North East as the vast majority of protected forest is in the South West. This does nothing towards protection our water, soil, threatened species, forest diversity and tourism industry.

I have campaigned for the protection of upper water catchments and forests for 20 years, while also providing alternatives for jobs and employment within the region. Northeast Tasmania is a very special place and I believe that the passing of the TFA will bring peace to our region – I have signed onto the Agreement in good faith that this will bring an end to the division within the community. I believe we can all move forward together, remembering that Industry also agree that this is the best solution to the current conflict over Public Native Forest management.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to make this submission to the committee.

Yours Sincerely,
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