

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

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Green protests began with the proposed scheme to flood Lake Pedder. This was to provide clean, simple and pollution free 'sustainable' electricity. The protest actions against the Gordon River development were successful. Thus the Green movement was successful in preventing improved sustainable energy generation. Has this been a good result for Tasmania?

The next protests were against the forest industry. In the early days it was to save specific special places, but it has evolved to be about all public land forestry. Many Agreements have been made in attempts to placate the Green movement; Salamanca, FFIC, RFA, TCFA. Yet the Greens never compromise. They never agree. Who would believe that in 2013 they might start?

Green protests have received broad media coverage, often with misleading information eventually being believed by some of the public. Terms such as 'high conservation value forest' (HCF) are now accepted without any understanding of what they actually mean. The term is without precise factual definition or scale of value; yet is held to be the definitive determinant for establishing the boundaries of new formal reserves. By Green definition, any forest is high conservation value; yet there is no HCF on private property or in current National Parks. Really!

The protestors are allegedly above criticism because they are 'saving the planet'; maintaining the high moral ground. The reality is that they are supporting the harvesting of forests in countries where the forest practices may not be as sound as those practised in Tasmania. Perverse.

And then to the round table to end forest conflict. But the forest protests continue! 'Markets for Change' and the 'Huon Valley Environment Centre' are not represented at the table, yet are major players. Forestry Tasmania, nor any private forest group, or indeed the government, are represented at the table. The initial Statement of Principles is a dog's breakfast. The West 'report' is a joke as it accepted the notion of HCF without question. The whole process is fundamentally flawed.

To destroy a triple bottom line sustainable forest industry, to ruin the lives of many people and rural communities is silly; and then to buy wood products from overseas and use fossil fuels and unsustainable steel ships to transport it is breathtakingly stupid.

Under the IGA, the two governments agreed to remove up to 572,000 hectares of native forest, purported to be high conservation value forest, from active sustainable forest management. And then spend money to identify and encourage other industries in these areas. Stupid.

We have a scientifically based Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative Reserve System which is about 4 times the area recommended by the IUCN. The World body recently reviewed the World Heritage Area and boundaries and essentially found them to be appropriate. We do not need any more reserves. We need employment, wealth generation, regional development and a thriving economy with sustainable industry. Could forestry be a better opportunity?

The Premier and Prime Minister chant that changed market conditions have caused the industry to falter. But 'the market' is still buying from other States their wood products, sawmillers are selling timber, veneer products continue to find markets, and overseas buyers are still purchasing wood, including chips. Tsunamis, exchange rates, global financial conditions and protest misinformation have affected markets.

Plantations have been mooted as acceptable forest management. How can high-intensity 'monoculture' forestry on short rotations be better than natural forestry over long rotation intervals? Perverse.

Fact continues to play second fiddle to a mantra of emotion, eco-vanity and bizarre and perverse outcomes. Ta Ann Tasmania sources wood from actively managed regrowth and regenerated forest. Old growth timber is not used. Yet the sledging continues. Why? And many harvested and regenerated forests are now claimed to be high conservation value! That's really perverse!

The management of the Triabunna woodchip mill will not accept wood from purported HCF. Is this blackmail? And the fact that 'vegetarians' bought the 'abattoir' is fantastically perverse too!

Access to special timbers will be drastically reduced. Signing the IGA will permanently reserve from harvest many forests with special timbers. Why? But possibly damaged by wildfires?

The Premier acknowledges that a majority of people and Parliament are in support of the pulp mill and continuing harvesting and management of native forests. The minority view has been heard. Democracy is by its essence rule by the majority. Minority rights need to be protected. However, the will of the majority should prevail.

The conservation movement has demonstrated time and time again that they will stop at nothing to ensure they succeed in their endeavours. Protest in the streets, invasion of work sites, disruption of businesses, lobbying financial institutions, damaging overseas markets, threatening overseas boycotts, whatever it takes for their will to prevail. Enough already!

Every issue will find a point where a choice must be made and that choice should be based on the mandate given a government by the people, based on its stated policy position. That choice should not be made by a few unelected individuals that represent a very vocal, biased and naive minority. It should have scientific backing.

We must ward off the politics of populism and perverse outcomes. The Legislative Council should vote down this Forest Agreement, and continue with the scientifically-based Regional Forest Agreement.

Leigh Edwards