

PULP MILL ASSESSMENT REPEAL BILL 2008 (No. 36)

Second Reading

[3.45 p.m.]

Mr SPEAKER – Before we start, there is 45 minutes for the debate, so therefore away we go. The Greens' principal speaker is entitled to take 40 minutes if they so desire.

Mr McKIM – If I could indicate by a point of order, Mr Speaker, that we absolutely intend to allow all three political parties to have their say because we believe that is the appropriate thing to do.

Mr SPEAKER – Okay, if you require that I will take this time out of it but I will give each speaker 10 minutes and then if you want to go beyond that it is up to you, okay?

Mr McKIM – There will certainly be adequate opportunity for the other two leaders to put their views on this debate.

Mr SPEAKER – The member for Bass, Mr Booth, has the call.

[3.46 p.m.]

Mr BOOTH (Bass – 2R) – I would like to first of all acknowledge the citizens of Launceston in the Chamber and thank them for coming along to hear this debate today.

Mr Speaker, I move –

That the bill be now read the second time.

The bill that I bring on for debate today is to repeal the Pulp Mill Assessment Act of 2007 and to revoke the pulp mill permit and any approval conditions. This obviously includes the revocation of section 11 of the Pulp Mill Assessment Act 2007, which is arguably the most antidemocratic section of any legislation ever introduced to any parliament in Australia. Lawyers who have been looking at the issue of section 11 and the removal of appeal rights have been unable to find any piece of Legislation anywhere in Australia. How proud is this Parliament in setting the record for arguably the most undemocratic law ever passed in this country? Shame!

To remind the members here that they voted for the act last year, section 11 included subsection 4, which allowed for criminal activity to occur in the pulp mill assessment and permit process and not have that criminal action delay or stop the pulp mill process. In the words of Mr Michael Stokes, senior law lecturer at the Faculty of Law at the University of Tasmania – and I quote:

‘The most alarming feature ... states that even criminal conduct (such as gaining a permit by the payment of bribes, corruption, fraud or intimidation), cannot delay the Pulp Mill Permit or any action authorized by it. This entails that a permit based on an assessment which is completely tainted by criminal activity remains valid.’

Professor Stokes reiterated that opinion on ABC Radio this morning when he said this of section 11:

‘What it did do was suggest that any criminality in the assessment and approval process would not affect the validity of the permit.’

I ask the Labor and Liberal members of this House today to consider carefully whether they really want to support again an act of parliament that condones and rewards criminal behaviour. However it is not just criminal behaviour that section 11 allows for. Again, in the words of Mr Michael Stokes, and I quote:

‘However, on one interpretation section 11 has far broader implications. If the mill is a “thing arising out of” the Act, section 11 may prevent any legal action being brought against the mill at common law.’

On the interpretation above, section 11 would take away that right, leaving people with no protection against the mill as long as it complied with its permit. That is wrong. Common law actions are the ultimate defence of the citizen against damage caused by others and should not be taken away.

Of course, if lawmakers went back to Hansard to look at the debate around section 11 to inform themselves of the intent of the legislation, they would find the pages blank, as Labor guillotined debate on the bill before section 11 was even discussed. Do members of this parliament realize that by voting for an act that includes section 11 they voted for the kind of law that might have prevented asbestos victims from claiming against James Hardie? Where would Bernie Banton be if legislation like section 11 had applied to him and his mates? I say again to the Liberal and Labor parties to consider carefully your vote today because if you keep supporting the Pulp Mill Assessment Act of 2007 you support the provision for criminal activity to occur around this project, yet you deny the fundamental rights of citizens to appeal against the impacts it might have on the health, homes, businesses and families. Where you stand on the Pulp Mill Assessment Act 2007 is not about where you stand on the pulp mill, it is about where you stand on principle and democracy. How was it that the Tasmanian Parliament found itself considering such an obvious and manipulative piece of legislation as the Pulp Mill assessment Act 2007 in the first place? Had ex-Premier Lennon not promised the Tasmanian people that the only way a pulp mill would ever be approved would be if it passed through an open, transparent and public RPDC process. I remind this House of what Paul Lennon said in his ministerial statement on Tuesday 26 October 2004 – that fateful day. I quote:

‘Let us be clear. Nothing could happen and nothing would happen regarding another pulp mill development in this State until we set the ground rules for the mill to be established. There is little likelihood that the private sector would have been prepared to seriously investigate a pulp mill project in Tasmania unless the ground rules were clearly established. Because of its scale, a project of State significance operates outside normal land use planning provisions but it is no less open and transparent in its process. It is more open, more transparent and more inclusive. It involves full public consultation. By its nature it is time-consuming, much slower than orthodox planning decisions. It is conducted by the Resource Planning and Development Commission, which I remind members is an independent body.’

That was the promise by the Labor Party to the people of Tasmania. The only way for this pulp mill to proceed was through the RPDC process. History shows that the pulp mill was proclaimed a project of State significance and it was critical that this project be assessed by the rigorous and open RPDC process because the project carries with it such enormous risks, especially at the sensitive Long Reach site.

Members should note that one of the first moves by Labor was to amend the State Policies and Projects Act so that a POSS project could become project-based rather than proponent-based so that you were not approving the Gunns Limited pulp mill but rather a pulp mill which allows for Gunns to on-sell the project, most likely to foreign corporations. The pulp mill poses a real threat to the health and wellbeing of the people of the Tamar Valley. The first point I want to make is that the proposed mill site is located on Aboriginal land that is rich in indigenous heritage and no permission has been granted by the Tasmanian Aboriginal community for the desecration of that site and the attendant destruction of Tasmanian indigenous history that will occur as a result of this pulp mill and the clear-felling of our native forested landscapes. Shame on you. Shame on this House for passing that.

The topography of the Tamar Valley means that its airshed is often defined by an inversion layer which traps air pollution in the valley and prevents its escape over the mountains that surround it. The Australian Medical Association has stated that there should be no additional pollution introduced into the Tamar Valley airshed. Eight people die each year as a result of pollution in the Tamar Valley already. They are the Governments own figures. Their members should have realized that scrutiny by the RPDC of the life-threatening impacts of this pulp mill was critical.

As I have mentioned, the mill and associated polluting infrastructure poses a real threat to critical regional industries such as food and wine, tourism, fishing and agriculture and a threat to Tasmania’s clean, green band. Investment is stalled in the Tamar Valley due to the spectre of the pulp mill hanging over the area. At risk are the organic fruit industries, the chemical-free agriculture, red meat industries, the aquaculture industry – and the list goes on. The pulp mill is impacting on real estate sales. The ‘For Sale’ signs have sprung up like mushrooms along the east and west Tamar, with vendors

talking of offers dropping by tens of thousands of dollars due to the threat of a pulp mill being built.

When we talk about the pulp mill we should bear in mind that the project also includes a chemical factory to make and sell thousands of tonnes of toxic chemicals to offset the cost of the mill; a wood-fired power station consuming 500 000 tonnes of green timber per year, equivalent to an additional 50 000 wood heaters being added to the Tamar Valley airshed and burning 1 million tonnes of green timber; 50 000 additional wood stoves in the Tamar Valley's already polluted airshed. It is a disgrace that you would even contemplate inflicting that on the people who already suffer in this dirty airshed.

The world's largest single-line, bleached eucalypt kraft mill – single line for efficiency in keeping costs down because you have chips sourced by pillaging our native forest and destroying water catchments and rural landscapes. Chemicals and water going in one end and a pipe spewing 64 000 tonnes of toxic waste today into pristine Bass Strait at the other, with no tertiary treatment, of course, as that just adds to the cost for Gunns. It also adds up to serious risk to other industries and the environment. The only independent cost benefit analysis of the project was undertaken by the Tasmanian Roundtable for Sustainable Industry which found, amongst other things, that risks to Tasmania's fishing industry due to dioxin contamination from pulp mill effluent could cost the industry \$693.5 million and 700 job losses over the life of the project. Shame on the Government that this study had to be undertaken by the community that was abandoned by the Government.

A project with that much risk attached needed the soundest scrutiny from Tasmania's resource management and planning system, but it was not to be. There has been no risk assessment of the pulp mill, which puts the residents and businesses that surround the mill at enormous risk. It should also be noted that a major geological fault line runs through the Long Reach area where it is proposed the mill be built. Instead of the rigorous, inquisitorial RPDC process, complete with public hearings, we had the Pulp Mill Assessment Bill 2007 and members might remember that attached to the bill were not the latest 2005 RPDC guidelines for the Gunns pulp mill at Long Reach, but the original generic 2004 guidelines that assessed for a mill at any location, such as Hampshire, rather than the Tamar Valley, with its specific issues concerning air quality. What a cynical move: risking the health of Tamar Valley residents and their families and what a fraud on the people of Tasmania.

The Pulp Mill Act swapped the open and transparent RPDC process for an absurdly condensed and narrow assessment in the form of the SWECO PIC report which was whipped up in a matter of weeks. The SWECO PIC report, however, was analysed by the National Toxic Network who found the following – and this is the work that the Government should have done before they brought this to the House:

'NTN has prepared an assessment of the gunns' pulp mill against key emission requirements using the same format as the SWECO report. Our

independent analysis using the available literature demonstrates that the pulp mill is only compliant with 28% of the requirements not 92% as claimed by SWECO. The selective use of literature by SWECO and the assumption that Gunns' claims are all correct at face value are major flaws in the SWECO report.'

Contrary to the claims of some commentators on the Gunns pulp mill process, the SWECO PIC report is not a green light for the pulp mill. It is so heavily burdened with assumptions and a readiness to commit critical requirements to some future permit system, that it cannot be seen as any sort of approval document. Upon detailed analysis and consideration of the available scientific literature, the SWECO PIC report should have recommended the pulp mill not be considered for any further approvals.

Even if I took the full 45 minutes allotted to the Greens private members' time, I could not cover the full extent of the scandal, deceit and manipulation that led to the cynical withdrawal from the RPDC process by Gunns Ltd and the subsequent fast track assessment by the Labor Government. However, in the context of this debate it is important to examine a couple of key myths. The myth that the RPDC was taking too much time to assess the project was the basis for Gunns' withdrawal. However, the simple refutation of that argument comes from the former Supreme Court Justice and ex-head of the RPDC panel, Mr Christopher Wright. It was Christopher Wright who, on 22 February 2007, told the RPDC directions hearing of the accumulated delays in the RPDC process of missed deadlines by Gunns Ltd and the fact that information, critical to the directions hearing, had only been provided by Gunns six days beforehand and I quote from Justice Wright:

'accumulated delays, all or most of which appear to have resulted from Gunns failure or inability to comply with their own prognostications or the panel's requirements.'

Gunns Ltd and Premier Lennon built on this first myth with a second when in June 2007, Gunns claimed they would lose \$1.076 million a day after 1 September if the mill was not approved by then. What a load of nonsense. It was this myth that led to the recalling of Parliament for the pulp mill vote and tellingly, Richard Herr made these comments on ABC radio yesterday, Tuesday 26 August and every member of Mr Bartlett's so-called connected, clever and kind Government should listen very carefully to what Richard Herr had to say yesterday on the radio and I quote:

'What it does raise is the question: should the Parliament now be reviewing what it has done in the wake of acting on misinformation – or at least information which has proved inaccurate? The question then is: were the inaccuracies deliberate? Were they known in advance? Were they presented to the Parliament as either political spin or economic spin much like a snake oil salesman knowing it to be wrong?'

In the original bill what we have seen over the past year is an enormous amount of information that says that the basis on which that bill was passed was inaccurate. Now, did someday mislead Parliament? Was it deliberate? If it was the company, will they show up at the Bar of Parliament to explain why they made claims which are simply untrue. John Gay should be called to the Parliament to explain the difference between his claims and reality.

Premier Lennon is no longer here to make comment but the remaining members of this House must now acknowledge key facts that should convince them to repeal the Pulp Mill Assessment Act. Firstly, the abandonment of the RPDC process took place under false pretences, significantly undermined Tasmania's planning systems and damaged the Tasmanian peoples' faith that elected representatives would uphold due process.

Secondly, the subsequent fast-tracking of the pulp mill assessment through Parliament to provide the pulp mill permit resulted in the majority of Tasmanians opposing the pulp mill project on the grounds that the pursuit of the project was corrupting democracy. So the Gunns Ltd pulp mill has already poisoned Tasmania's democracy as surely as it will poison Tasmania's environment.

Thirdly, the reasons used to justify the Pulp Mill Assessment Act 2007, namely that the proponent would lose \$1 million a day if construction was not commenced by 1 September 2007, now stands exposed as false. This is a matter that ex-Premier Lennon and Gunns CEO John Gay will no doubt have to explain.

The genesis of the act that the Greens seek to repeal today came from one of the most shameful periods of public life that this State has witnessed. On the same day that the Pulp Mill Assessment Act was being debated, albeit briefly, in the Tasmanian Parliament on 22 March last year, Christopher Wright released a statutory declaration detailing attempts by Paul Lennon to interfere with the RPDC process, attempts that would lead to Mr Wright's resignation. Interestingly, Mr Hodgman, Leader of the Liberal Opposition, raised the serious allegation of Christopher Wright being leant on by Premier Lennon and yet the Liberals, astonishingly, voted for the pulp mill act that was borne out of that intimidation. Mr Hodgman, your words will ring hollow if you raise the scandals around the RPDC and then vote against this bill today, the very best bill that could restore the dignity of this Parliament against those scandals.

Perhaps one of the greatest indictments against the Pulp Mill Assessment Act 2007 is to look at the events which led to its drafting and tabling in this Parliament. In a few dark weeks we now understand the following to have happened. On 22 February, Christopher Wright states that accumulative delays in the RPDC process are the fault of Gunns. The next day, 23 February, Paul Lennon receives a letter from John Gray saying that Gunns wanted clarity around the assessment time line – that is from the *Examiner*, 14 March 2007. On 25 February, just three days later, Paul Lennon convened a meeting in the Premier's executive suite in Hobart, which was attended by John Gay and the Gunns board, ex-Deputy Premier Steve Kons, Treasurer Michael Aird and Solicitor-General Bill

Bale. Two days after that on 27 February, Premier Lennon meets with Mr Christopher Wright to request a commitment that the RPDC process be expedited sooner. Mr Wright responds to the Premier that he cannot give that undertaking. According to Mr Wright, at that meeting the Premier gave him the ultimatum that if the RPDC process was not speeded up and public hearings dropped then Lennon would introduce special legislation to Parliament. On 2 March 2007 and it is reported that Simon Cooper, acting RPDC executive commissioner, drafts a letter outlining that Gunns' supplementary information is insufficient and amounts to a critical non-compliance with RPDC requirements. The letter is forwarded to the head of the Department of Premier and Cabinet, Linda Hornsey. It is further reported that Hornsey requested that the letter not be sent and that Gunns was informed of its content. On 14 March, Gunns pulls out of the RPDC process. On 15 March, Premier Lennon announces to Parliament that the Gunns pulp mill assessment will now be decided by Parliament. On 19 March the Premier is reported as admitting that representatives from DPAC have met with Gunns to discuss the proposed pulp mill legislation. On 22 March the statutory declaration by former Supreme Court Justice Wright is publicly released detailing intimidation from ex-Premier Lennon, and the Pulp Mill Assessment Bill 2007 is debated at the House of Assembly.

Mr Speaker, members should be fully aware, as they consider their vote today, that in a sworn declaration a former Supreme Court Justice stated that one of the key reasons the Pulp Mill assessment Bill 2007 was introduced to this Parliament was that it was the only way to deny the Tasmanian people public hearings on the pulp mill. In the early hours of 23 March 2007, Labor guillotined debate and this Parliament passed the Pulp Mill Assessment Bill 2007 with only the Greens voting against it.

I want to remind the Parliament that the people of Tasmania who trusted you to protect their interests are now dismayed, disillusioned and feeling betrayed by your actions. They have marched in their tens of thousands and have written thousands of letters. Before they were betrayed by the corrupt acquiescence granted to Gunns by the Lennon Government, they did the forensic work on this project that the Government should have done and submitted to the RPDC their overwhelming concerns in the form of more than 700 submissions. They now find themselves forced to take action in the courts to regain their common law rights in respect to damage caused by the mill, to seek relief in the courts to uphold due process, procedural fairness and natural justice.

Premier Bartlett, you were part of the Lennon Government, and you voted on false evidence to approve this stinking mill against the interests of all Tasmanians. By doing so you participated in the corruption of the democratic processes and irrevocably damaged Tasmania's reputation as a robust democracy. Premier Bartlett, I call on you to restore faith in democracy and demonstrate that the words you recently uttered – that you are a democratist – are not just empty weasel words. Premier, you have also stated that people are saying to you, 'David, fix this mess', and that this is what you intend to do. Well, Premier, draw that line in the sand, leave Gunns pulp mill behind you and move into the future.

Applause from the Gallery.

Mr Speaker – Order, order! I am sure you have all come along to hear the debate. I have warned you once before and I now warn those who entered after I gave that warning. You are not here to cheer, you are not here to participate; you are here to listen. I will not hesitate to clear the hall if it is necessary.

Mr Booth – I particularly call on the members for Bass – Michelle O’byrne , Jim Cox, Sue Napier and Peter Gutwein – to vote for the people of the Tamar Valley and put an end today to the fear and uncertainty, the economic damage and the corruption of democracy that you all bear responsibility for as a result of your putting the interests of Gunns before those of the people.

In the ninth Manning Clark lecture delivered by prominent lawyer Julian Burnside in Canberra, he said this:

‘When Law and Justice part company, we are betrayed; when Parliament makes unjust laws, we are betrayed; when Justice is promised but is placed beyond reach, democracy fails.’

The Pulp Mill Assessment Act 2007 is an unjust law that betrayed the trust which the people of Tasmania placed in their elected representatives. It is an act that allows for criminal activity. It is an act that denies the Tasmanian people their fundamental rights of appeal. It is an act that was born out of abandonment of due process, undermining of the Tasmanian planning system, interference in independent statutory bodies and intimidation of statutory officers. Its justification was based on falsehood, and its urgency has been revealed as a charade.

A vote for the repealing of the Pulp Mill Assessment Act 2007 is not a vote only against the Gunns Ltd pulp mill. It is a vote for the restoration of democracy, a vote for the acknowledgement of the fundamental rights of citizens to take action in common law against threats to their health, home and livelihoods. It is a vote for the right of independent bodies and their appointed officers to undertake their duties free from interference and intimidation. It is a vote for the upholding of due process and the integrity of Parliament. It is a vote for the upholding of due process and the integrity of Parliament. I ask members to vote today with their conscience.

There are many in this Chamber today who know what I have said is the truth, who are deeply disturbed by the shadow cast by the pulp mill over this Parliament, and who know that the Pulp Mill Assessment Act 2007 is a corrosive piece of legislation built on falsehoods and deceit. I ask you all to look deep into your hearts and vote today with the honesty and integrity that the people of Tasmania have always expected but now demand, and repeal the Pulp Mill Assessment Act 2007. Mr Speaker, I commend the bill to the House.

[4.09 p.m.]

Mr Bartlett (Denison – Premier) – Mr Speaker, I can inform the House of course that the Government will not be supporting this bill.

Green members – Shame!

Mr Bartlett – As I have said on many occasions in here, and I will repeat again, I believe the future of this project will stand or fall now on the proponent's ability to get finance and to meet the conditions under the various permits that they are required to do so. I am of the view that this Government has done enough and I know many here today would say too much, but this should not be read as –

Interruption from the Gallery.

Applause from the Gallery.

Mr Speaker – Order, order! I warn the Gallery that if there are any more interruptions I will suspend the sitting and have the Gallery cleared.

Mr Bartlett – Thank you Mr Speaker. I note that Opposition members have tried to imply that somehow I am equivocal for this project. If I believed based on the science that this pulp mill, as claimed by the previous speaker, provided a threat to the health and wellbeing of the people of Tasmania and the Tamar Valley, I would not support it. That is a fact. I would not support it if in my heart of hearts I believed that this project provided a threat to the health and wellbeing of Tasmanians, and I do not believe anyone, including the Leader of the Opposition or anyone on my side of the Parliament, would either.

I believe this project is based on good science, good economics and good outcomes, but I accept that there are many who believe it was not based on good process. As I said in my previous speech earlier this afternoon, I support the downstream processing and the value-adding of Tasmanian resources, whether that resource is wood, wind, water, rocks and metals or fish or vegetables. I am of the firm belief we should create more value for ourselves here in this place out of those resources than we have done in the past. That is why I cannot support this bill today and why I supported the original bill in the first place.

I believe this is an important project for the future of Tasmania's sustainable forest industries. So while I do firmly believe that this project is now in the hands of the proponent, it does not mean and should not be read as meaning that I do not support the original intent and embodiment or implantation of this project. We will disagree on the emotion, on the science and a whole range of things, but I think it is really important to take this opportunity to clarify some misconceptions about section 11 of the Pulp Mill Assessment Act. I mentioned this yesterday in question time and said that I believed these misconceptions were being vocalized by the Tasmanian Greens. I have just heard it now in the member's speech.

Mr Booth – So do you have any advice? Where's your legal advice?

Mr Speaker – Order.

Mr Bartlett – Section 11 does not restrict the rights of individuals and organizations to take any form of action if they consider they have incurred some form of loss through the actions or operations of the pulp mill. That is really important, but that is exactly what the previous speaker was claiming. It is not true, it is completely false. The effect of section 11 of the Pulp Mill Assessment Act 2007 is merely to limit the right to appeal any actions, decisions, processes or other matters arising from the assessment process. I think this is a really important point because we want to talk about the facts in here – and I know that colourful rhetoric is important to all of us at various times in this place – but, for example, if the environment regulator places certain conditions pertaining to bulk earthworks such as dust control – and I just use this as an example – then those conditions are final and not subject to challenge or appeal. That is the case right throughout Tasmania's planning system. In many ways you can equate this to the final planning decision of a planning regulator body. The planning decision is final, but this does not prevent future action or compensation if a loss can be demonstrated, so your example of Bernie Banton and asbestos is completely fallacious.

It should be noted that section 11 also prevents – and this is very important because this is a point that I think people who have been misled on this section should understand – the proponent, in this case Gunns, from taking any further action in respect of decisions made by regulators in relation to the pulp mill permit. So the removal of section 11 would, in fact, unfetter Gunns legally to take further action. I know you do not like it but it is the truth. If at some subsequent point in time a party feels that they have incurred some loss as a result of operations of the pulp mill, then they will be able to take the usual appropriate action, and I would protect them to the hilt to do so. Section 11 does not remove their right to do so.

Mr McKim – Yes, it does.

Mr Bartlett – It does not.

Mr Booth – Says who?

Mr Bartlett – The Solicitor-General says so. We will not be supporting the bill.

Time expired.

[4.16 p.m.]

Mr Rockliff (Braddon – Deputy Leader of the Opposition) – On behalf of the State Opposition can I indicate that the State Liberals will be opposing this bill. We see this as a classic Greens stunt, which we have all sadly become accustomed to in this House, completely ignoring the fact that the pulp mill will only go ahead if it meets the

stringent environmental guidelines that have been laid down by independent experts, including the Director of Environmental Management and Pollution Control and Australia's Chief Scientist.

Regarding section 11, we have also done our research, and once the permits are issued exactly the same protections apply and are available to Tasmanians as if the permits had been issued as a result of the RPDC process. The laws of Tasmania as they apply under a range of statutes are not fettered in any way in relation to the ability of ordinary Tasmanians to make claims, to bring forward actions and the full weight of the law if Gunns or any other entity or body covered by the permit conditions. That is a fact. At a state level, there are 800 unique permits that have been condensed into 16 schedules and whilst some of these are quite straightforward, some represent absolutes or hold points at which point development may be forced to cease if they are not met. This applies in both construction and operation of the mill.

Mr speaker, Tasmanians are becoming increasingly concerned about the Tasmanian Greens' anti-investment, anti-jobs and anti-value-adding opportunity and attitude to development in this State.

Interruption from the Gallery.

Mr Speaker – Order, order!

Mr Rockliff – I was absolutely staggered to read yesterday that the Greens are at it again, opposing water development in this State in times of drought.

Mr Mckim – What do you think this pulp mill is doing to water quality and quantity?

Mr Rockliff – Here I refer to the latest attempt by Greens supporters to appeal against the pipeline in the Meander Valley, a pipeline that will deliver water to farmers in desperate need of it and will generate \$20 million of gross farm output and result in hundreds of extra jobs, not to mention providing governments with extra capacity to deliver important services to Tasmanians such as health and education.

In terms of the pulp mill assessment process, the State Opposition has said many times before and we will say it again, that the series of events that led up to the pulp mill project being withdrawn from the RPDC and approved by Parliament were regrettable in the extreme. Sadly, we were witness to yet another example of poor project management by this Labor State Government. Because of mismanagement, this issue has divided the Tasmanian community and led to a massive loss of faith in the Tasmanian Government generally and sadly, in the project itself. It is a matter of record that, as a result, Parliament was recalled to debate a new assessment process for the pulp mill, a process that was approved by both Houses – democracy in action.

Interruption from Gallery.

Mr Speaker – Order.

Mr Rockliff – Mr Speaker, while we would have preferred this project to have been assessed by the RPDC, there was no reason why the Parliament could not access whether or not the proposal should go ahead based on whether it met stringent environmental guidelines. The critical test for the State opposition was whether the independent regulator's permits and the environmental and operating conditions and guidelines were sufficiently stringent for the sort of world-class development that Tasmania deserves. On the basis of all the information provided in the form of reports, briefings from experts, independent expert advice and consultation with key stakeholders, we formed a considered view that this pulp mill would meet the stringent environmental guidelines set down. On that basis we supported the project and our view has not changed.

The Australian Government also assessed the mill. A key point in the summary advice provided by the Chief Scientist of Australia, Dr Jim Peacock, on the project was that the technical and engineering advances that had been made in the design and operation of elemental chlorine-free pulp mills, such as this Gunns proposal, are indeed impressive.

Why have the Greens put forward this bill today? Not because the mill does not meet the environmental guidelines but because, according to a media release issued by Greens' MHA, Kim Booth, it is running behind schedule and finance is looking less secure. The pulp mill was approved against strict environmental guidelines, not on the basis of finance or timing and it should therefore be repealed on that basis. Imagine every new development that went through a planning approvals process in Tasmania could suddenly be repealed on the basis of unrelated factors? If we, as a Parliament, were to revoke approvals on the basis that projects run late, then nothing in this State would ever happen and no investor would ever choose to come and invest in Tasmania.

This is nothing but a stunt that the Greens have chosen to pull for the Launceston sitting of Parliament. The Greens' logic is flawed and were this bill to be approved it would have disastrous repercussions for business investment in this State.

The Tasmanian Liberal Party has long supported the construction of a pulp mill to value-add our timber resource and to provide diversification in our forestry industry, providing it meets strict environmental and social guidelines. This project will provide the biggest private sector investment in the State's history - \$2 billion worth of investment. ITS Global assessed the mill and said it would add 2.5 per cent to Tasmania's annual gross State product, equating to an increase in Tasmania's economic output of \$6.7 billion over the next two and a half decades. By 2030 the north of the State alone would be \$640 million better off, and living standards, property values and social indicators in this region would rise.

Unlike the Premier, the State opposition stands firm in support of this project. We will not flip-flop and pander to the Greens or forget the importance of our resource-based industries to the State's economy. We draw a line in the sand under these important pillars of our economy. We supported the pulp mill last year because we were satisfied that it met the stringent environmental guidelines that were laid down. The upper House, the Australian Government and the Chief Scientist all supported the project. These key criteria have not changed. The Greens are trying to move the goal posts as usual. In doing so they are demonstrating that they are not interested in whether or not this project meets the science.

This is just about opposing the project for opposition's sake. The Greens' logic is completely flawed. To revoke approval for the bill on the basis of issues such as financing and timing, as the Greens said in their media release a few weeks ago, issues not relevant to the approval of the actual pulp mill permit or to the Federal Government's approval, would be an absolute disgrace. It shows that the Tasmanian Greens never cared whether the mill met the science or not. They are only interested in playing politics and stopping development and jobs in this State dead in their tracks. The Opposition will not be supporting this bill.

[4.26 p.m.]

Ms Singh (Denison) – This bill before us is not about decision-making. The Parliament made its decision on this issue in August last year. The future of this pulp mill is now in the hands of the company, its financiers and its abilities to meet the conditions of its permits. This is not a bill about substance; it is a bill about style. It is a bill in the style typical of the Greens. The debate of substance on this issue was conducted this time last year.

Mr Whiteley – Yes, without you in it.

Mr Speaker – Order.

Ms Singh – I contributed to that debate. My views and my eventual position at that time are very well known and I stand by that position. The decision I made was not an easy one. It was not a decision I took lightly. At that time the Greens criticised my position as being weak. They claimed that it stood for nothing. However, in the last few days the Greens have praised that decision as principled and courageous.

Mr Mckim – No, I have not.

Mr Singh – Yes, you have. Now today you claim that if I do not support this bill then again I must be weak or – worse – that I have abandoned those principles. That is outrageous. These claims by the Greens represent the politics of convenience. My position on the original decision is well known but this bill will not achieve anything. Whether we are happy with it or not, the Parliament determined a process earlier this year and it now needs to run its course. It will not help anyone to change it now. Tasmanians want certainty one way or another. This bill would just put the project back in limbo

again, which I know is the last thing that Tasmanians want to see, whether they support the mill or not. The Premier has already given Gunns a deadline. The Greens should at least acknowledge this but, no that would not be politically convenient for them. I will not be drawn into the Greens' politics of convenience. I will not be drawn into political game-playing designed to muddy the waters and distract the Government from other decisions that really do matter to people in Tasmania. Those decisions are the issues affecting people in my electorate. The Government's priorities for people in my electorate, issues they are talking about, are education and training, health and human services, and building capacity for a safe and prosperous future for Tasmanians.

Green members interjecting.

Ms Singh – As the Premier has said, this new Government in government has drawn a line in the sand on this issue. The Parliament has done enough on this issue and it is now clearly up to the proponent whether or not this mill proceeds. I will not support something that achieves no more than to score political points for the Greens. There is no substance to this bill and I stand by the Premier. This Government and this Parliament have done enough.

Mr Speaker – The question is that the bill be now read the second time.

The bells have been rung and the House having proceeded to a division –

Interruption from Gallery.

Mr Speaker – Order! Order! I will have the bells stopped. I will clear the Gallery, adorn the House and return to the division later. The sitting is suspended.

Sitting suspended from 4.30 p.m. to 4.49 p.m.

The House divided –

AYES 4

NOES 18

Mr Booth
Mr Mckim
Mr Morriss
Ms O'Connor (Teller)

Mr Bartlett
Mr Best
Mr Butler (Teller)
Mrs Butler
Mr Cox
Ms Giddings
Mr Green
Mr Gutwein
Mr Hidding
Mr Michael Hodgman
Mr Will Hodgman
Mr Kons

Mr Llewellyn
Ms O'Byrne