



Florentine Protection Society

Patron: Steve Biddulph

Submission to Legislative Council January 2013

The Secretary,
Legislative Council Select Committee on the Tasmanian Forests Agreement Bill 2012,
Parliament of Tasmania,
Hobart, Tasmania. 7004.

Dear Sir,

The Florentine Protection Society Inc. determined at its committee meeting of 9th January 2013 to make a submission to your committee urging the Legislative Council to pass the Tasmanian Forests Agreement Bill 2012 without amendment.

The Florentine Protection Society requests that the committee consider the following points in its deliberations :

- ◆ There has been a strong negative public reaction to the Legislative Council decision not to endorse the Inter-governmental Agreement. We believe that this reflects the fact that the community is ready to move beyond the polarization around forestry issues that we have seen over recent decades and that most Tasmanians want to see an end to the so-called “Forest Wars”.
- ◆ Letters to the Editor which were critical of the Legislative Council, comment on talk back radio, and other public comment displayed a surprising degree of unanimity from *all* sides of the debate. Therefore this criticism cannot be dismissed as merely from one sector of the community. This fundamental shift in public opinion shows there is a broadly-based perception that this agreement, while not perfect, is a giant step forward and provides the best chance for peace in the forests.
- ◆ **B**ackground work by a panel of experts has come at great cost to the taxpayer and should not be treated lightly. This protracted process yielded very detailed information on a range of relevant factors. Whilst time-consuming and expensive, it did give the negotiators a firm foundation of factual data and appropriate bench-marks.
- ◆ The high conservation values of the forests now ear-marked for protection have already been proved, in a rigorous assessment by experts, in a process independent of the I.G.A.. Some areas have been slated for conservation for many years, so this process is only confirming the perception that those areas are of significant value.
- ◆ Negotiations included the key *representative* bodies; for the first time industry, unions and conservationists worked through all relevant issues in one process, to reach agreement.
- ◆ Some representative bodies chose not to participate. Whether due to low expectations

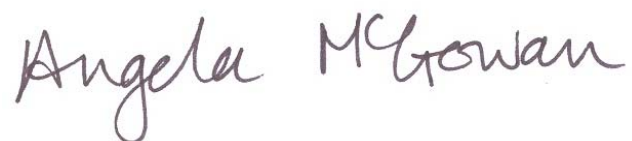
in regard to outcomes, or dissatisfaction about the process and participants, is not clear but the fact remains that over the protracted period of negotiations there was more than enough opportunity for any views to be put forward, either formally or informally. That some chose not to do so is no argument against the final agreement.

- ◆ Negotiations included the key *representative* bodies; for the first time industry, unions and conservationists worked through all relevant issues in one process, to reach agreement.
- ◆ The final details of the I.G.A. represent significant compromise *on all sides*. The role of the Legislative Council is to review legislation, BUT this was a *negotiated agreement*. Tampering with the agreement could radically change this, making it in fact a different agreement, one which the different parties may not feel bound to. This is a historic opportunity to finally deal with the forestry industry issues which have caused such division in this State for many years. The Legislative Council needs to be the enabling body here – not the stumbling block.
- ◆ Debate in the Legislative Council often focussed on individuals affected by changes in the forest industry. Major job losses in the industry have already happened quite independently of this agreement process, but due primarily to market forces. The critical issue here is the future of the industry as a whole – if it is to survive at all. Contractors and workers have already been severely affected but it will only get worse if the industry just staggers on with no certainty - the Legislative Council has a responsibility to look at the bigger picture for Tasmania.
- ◆ It is worth noting that some operators stand to profit by failure of the agreement as it would provide opportunity for them to buy up supply contracts at a handsome profit. Would the Select Committee ask who stands to benefit from it not being implemented? Its failure could mean continuation of an unsustainable and uneconomic industry to benefit a few players, to the detriment of everyone else.
- ◆ The I.G.A. is supported by the majority of the forestry industry itself, due to the collapse of the international market. The only way to salvage part of that market is to have certainty of supply. As mentioned above, changes in the industry have already led to job losses in the past, as well as the collapse of some key players in the industry.
- ◆ Forestry Tasmania has to be continually propped up financially by the taxpayer – a very direct indication of just how much the industry needs to be re-structured at every level.
- ◆ We see the I.G.A. as a unique opportunity to achieve a sustainable agreement to end the “Forest Wars” which have polarized the Tasmanian community for decades – why would the Legislative Council undermine such a comprehensive process?
- ◆ There are significant financial implications for the State. Implementation of the agreement comes with one-off Commonwealth funds which are sorely needed for Regional Economic Development projects in many communities.
- ◆ If the I.G.A. is not made into legislation, protests against the continued logging of high conservation value forests will inevitably move to the market place, with possible impacts on more than just the forestry industry. Protests are, of course, a legitimate part of the democratic process, but in this instance they would also exacerbate an already unsustainable situation, with forestry contractors, workers and the Tasmanian community the ultimate losers.

We earnestly appeal to the members of the Select Committee to consider these points in the spirit in which they are offered. As concerned citizens, as conservationists, as thoughtful people, we consider that the I.G.A. offers the best way forward for Tasmania

– a sustainable forest industry, guaranteed wood supply, appropriate protection for high conservation value forests, funds for regional economic development, and an end to conflict over balancing these factors. All this is within our grasp if the Legislative Council supports the I.G.A. and passes the Tasmanian Forests Agreement Bill 2012 without amendment.

Signed for and on behalf of the Committee of the Florentine Protection Society.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Angela McGowan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Angela McGowan
Secretary,
Florentine Protection Society