

I wish to make a submission to the Legislative Council Select Committee concerning the Tasmanian Forests Agreement.

I have grave concerns about this agreement. My concerns are itemised below.

1. Forestry in Tasmania has been through many agreements in the past that were primarily centred around appeasing conservationists at the cost of continually reducing the area of production forest in Tasmania. In every case the conservationists accepted forests being put into reserves but have never been satisfied that there is enough protected forest in Tasmania and that there is a place for sustainable forestry production. The Regional Forest Agreement was a milestone in that the process involved identifying forests that were under represented in existing reserves and locating and attempting to reserve those remaining rarer forests. Unfortunately, and as was to be expected, many of these rarer forest types were on private property and not on State Forest, so protection is difficult and costly. The process clearly showed that most forests on State Forest were adequately protected in existing reserves. This process put aside emotion and concentrated on pure science to classify the forests, identify which were well reserved and which were not and to then go about protecting forests that should have been protected. It appears the current proposal takes no account of forest types and rarity and is focused solely on hectares.

2. Tasmania currently has by far the highest percentage of officially reserved forest and land as a total of its land area than any other country in the world. While this appears admirable and no doubt we are hailed as pace setters elsewhere, these are the actions of an affluent society where setting aside large tracts of land and forest at the expense of job perpetuation and creation is affordable. Sadly Tasmania is not an affluent society and we rely heavily on the other States of Australia to share their financial development with us in an attempt to foster equality in living standards. This is not fair to other Australians and it discourages better and more responsible economic performance, not the least is that it is not a sustainable situation. It is only a matter of time until the other States refuse to continue subsidising our standard of living, as was touted this year. An incoming conservative government will probably be elected on a fiscal responsibility platform and will be eager to introduce measures to make States perform better economically, very likely at Tasmania's expense. Whilst they will be happy to accept that Tasmania has most of its production forest locked up and internationally Australia can hold its head high on forest preservation, Tasmania will bear the cost of that concession in jobs, standard of living and increased costs to purchase timber.

3. I often see figures quoted in the newspapers that determine there are relatively few people directly employed in the forest industry. Everyone knows that the downstream employment from forestry is very significant. In towns like Scottsdale, Huonville, Smithton and Triabunna, the bulk of the local population either directly or indirectly rely on forestry to generate business and employment. Without this rural stimulation these towns will become backwaters with the ongoing migration of young and now older people to the major centres. This will leave the remaining industries and population without the scale of local employment and income generation to sustain smaller businesses. Much like a falling pack of cards, the impact will not be so obvious until it is irreversible. One has only to look at the series of towns down New Zealand's west coast since native forest logging was halted some years ago. A drive through reveals boarded up shops, closed schools and towns suffering severe economic depression.

4. While the industry is currently in a quiet spell, much like many quiet periods we have experienced in the past, there is no doubt the building industry will rebound and the demand for timber will increase sharply. Turning huge areas of production forest into reserves during lulls in demand is short-sighted and leaves absolutely no means of recovering the industry when opportunity and demand reappear. There is no question the forest industry is going through a transition, as it probably should. The transition should involve better utilisation of the forest produce with lower impacts. The best opportunity to mitigate impact is to harvest forest products over a large estate with small and localised operations. There should be scope to disperse operations widely to reduce not only environmental impact, but to reduce public perception of wide scale devastation. By significantly reducing the area of production forest, the industry has no choice but operate intensely on the areas available and will no doubt be criticized again resulting in further demands for expanded estate protection and disbandment of the industry. Tasmania must not and should not become a net importer of timber products, whether they come from other States without a large percentage of their forests locked up or from South Sea Island forests where no Forest Practises Codes exist or no sustainable forest management is practised.

5. The management of large reserves in Tasmania is currently a serious issue that will be exacerbated by expanding those reserves significantly. Unroaded and inaccessible reserves are expensive and difficult to protect from wild fires. In a gradually warming climate, the incidence of wildfire is something Australians and Tasmanians will have to learn to live with. The Victorian bushfires gave us all a picture of what we might have to expect in the future. Their forests were very similar to ours and they burnt fiercely and extensively with significant loss of life and property. Strategic fuel reduction burning was identified in Victoria as an activity that was under resourced and not carried out adequately each year. Despite a significant increase in funding and personnel and some increase in burning, Victoria continues to be threatened by large uncontrollable fires and will do so into the future. Forestry Tasmania has a well-trained, professional workforce that has practised strategic fuel reduction burning for many years and has put fire-fighters on the front line at most big wildfires in Tasmania whether they are on public or private land. Forest Contractors have provided labour and heavy equipment to fight fires for many years. Their impact in reducing and preventing damaging wildfires will not be realised until the workforce is dismantled and it is left to an under resourced fire service and volunteers to protect life and property. Currently in isolated reserves, the Parks and Wildlife Service make a judgement on the impact of a wildfire and determine whether or not resources should be deployed to attempt to put the fire out or it is left to run its natural course. In a hugely expanded reserve area, it is hard to imagine the public at large, including conservationists and "asthma sufferers", will be happy to allow the State Government to sit back and allow tens of thousands of hectares to burn and destroy forests. The end result in my mind is fire fighting at huge cost to society and that cost not offset by other forest operations as currently occurs, something a struggling economy like ours can ill afford.

6. I have concerns about the forest company Ta Ann putting pressure on the Legislative Council to rubber stamp this agreement. As much as the company does downstream processing in Tasmania, which is a positive, other aspects of their operation concern me. The logs they use appear to be young sawlogs and I wonder if that resource might be worth a lot more to Tasmania as quality sawn timber in the future rather than as exported veneer. I also believe there is an unfortunate amount of

waste with the logs they do use. I believe over length logs are cut to length with significant wastage and logs with minor defects are rejected on site. There is also a concern that the reduction in their available resource will lead to them asking for Commonwealth money to subsidise their operation. It would be far better for them to improve utilisation and accept, like everyone else is being asked to do, there is now less resource to work with. A simple question to them about final recovery of veneer from logs delivered on site would be very revealing I suspect.

7. I can't help wondering if we would be going through this unfortunate process if the State Government was in power with a majority and if the Federal Government was in the same situation. Time and again I read that the majority of Tasmanians want this agreement. My feeling is that if the majority wanted this agreement, they would have voted Green accordingly at the last election. With Green popularity falling dramatically, I wonder if we rush this agreement through, we might be left with a future majority government trying to dismantle this without bankrupting the State. In a State with a significantly aging population, it makes no sense to continue dismantling industries that employ young people. I have a son that works in the industry and I have four Grandsons. I love living in Tasmania and it would be nice if they were able to live and work here as well.

As a final word, anyone that believes locking away a huge amount of Tasmania's forest will result in peace in the forest, need only look at the results of past agreements and similar promises from conservation groups. Sadly, many hundreds of Tasmanians can go about legally doing their work in the forest in a sustainable and productive way, but a mere handful of protesters will always get the publicity and can bring an entire operation to a halt effortlessly. After an entire working life in the forest industry, I listen and read their untruths and misrepresentations almost daily and it frustrates me. Fact and science are replaced by lies and emotion and the general public is swamped with it and don't really know what to believe. It always amazes me that if I went and barricaded myself to the door of a business operating legally anywhere in Tasmania, I would and should be arrested, fined and prevented from doing it again. Apparently the protesters are not constrained by the same standards, ethics and laws as I am.

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