

Investigation into the Tasmanian Forests Bill 2012

I am not going to try and convince you to support or reject the Bill, other than to say that the state of Tasmania needs to be able to build on the advantages of its natural and built resources; and its labour force, just as every other state and territory in the Commonwealth does.

The forestry debate has been an issue that has created immense tension within the narrow community that comprises, those who support forestry in Tasmania and those who do not. However the broader community is confused and does not see how the forestry issue can influence or impact on them as individuals, one way or the other.

This has occurred because:

- With such an incredibly high percentage of households that have, as their major source of income, commonwealth support - a Centre Link cheque (approximately 34% of all households in Tasmania), many Tasmanian do not see how the forestry debate affects them.

However Tasmania, as do other states, needs a strong and prosperous business community to support their communities with jobs, now and for future generations.

- Tasmania has become the 'beachhead' for the nation's environmental movement. This is an observation not a criticism.

What that converts to is an extremely focused and well-funded set of ongoing campaigns that have been rolled out over the years. The latest being forestry. This has negatively impacted Tasmania more than any other state.

As the success on forestry protests appears to be coming to a conclusion, the focus has already commenced on mining. The groups are also advancing on aquaculture and agriculture.

So where is the answer with the current Bill that has been tabled?

Two observations:

Financial – The locking up of resources and therefore jobs attached to them, does not provide compensation to all who have lost (or will lose) their livelihoods in the forestry industries and the business communities that in the past have supported them.

Therefore the federal and state compensation dollars should be attached to the specific individuals and businesses that were and will be negatively affected. The funding should retrain and retool those immediately affected with the closing down of forests however this is currently not the case. The money is being placed across various industry sectors. It also does not provide compensation to the private forestry sector, which once was approximately 50% of the forestry industry.

Tasmania must also guard against any payments made in the proposed package to be negated in future funding needs of the state, particularly in the areas of health, education and infrastructure.

Social – there appears to be strong nation-wide community support (as judged by the reactions of the federal and state governments in pushing this Bill through) and the willingness to fund an exit for the forestry industry for perpetuity.

There is a Plan B that could include:

- A compensation plan fully paid for by the Commonwealth (all Australian citizens), with no on-going repercussions financially for Tasmania;
- A fixed term of the proposed forestry lockup. This could be for a 15 year term (this being the period that the original compensation offer was to flow). At the conclusion of the 15 year term, the situation be renegotiated, allowing the next generation to decide on its attitude to forestry at that time;
- \$75 million per annum (or an agreed amount), indexed to CPI for the term of the agreement, for business development and support, to bring the timber industry up to contemporary standards (as defined by the community); and skills development and training for forestry workers; and
- A joint management of Tasmanian forestry by a consortium of forestry interests, including business and environmentalists

Questions that need to be asked are:

- What will a new forestry sector look like?
- What investment is required to create a viable forestry sector?
- What does the forestry industry (based on renewable plantations) need to do to become economically and socially sustainable?
- What will happen to the private forestry sector if this Bill goes ahead as tabled?
- What industry or industries (jobs) will replace the forestry sector if this Bill goes ahead as tabled?
- Why is the potential use of biofuel NOT included in federal funding for research?

The debate has been long and bitter. There are few who think that this situation will change with the current Bill before the House, as it does not have the support of many interest groups from both sides of the debate, who are not represented by the signatories.

I wish you well in your deliberations and pray that you have the wisdom and the strength to make the decision that is right for the state, now and into the future?

I am available to discuss any of the issues that I have raised.

Respectfully yours,

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