

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

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(full contact details in covering email)
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Dear Honourable Members,

This is a short submission, seeking to make one major point.

The point is that for the very first time in the tortuous history of the forestry industry and of forest reservation for conservation purposes in Tasmania we have a *negotiated agreement* as to a way forward, negotiated between the peak bodies representing industry, workers, and conservationists.

This provides an amazing opportunity for legislators to create a framework which can change the way things are done in Tasmania, and change our community social relationships markedly for the better. Unfortunately we as an island population have had to endure for the last three or four decades a reality in which subtlety of opinion has been markedly absent; one large group of people simplistically calls another “exploiters” and “rednecks” while being themselves regarded as “radical greenies” and wreckers of any development proposal.

If these polarised groups were a minor feature of our society it may not matter, but the two poles have come to characterise our society as a whole. This is extremely unhealthy, and creates a situation in which it is well nigh impossible to get anything done other than by force – as well as injecting an element of suspicion into what in most places would be ordinary societal interaction.

The opportunity to pass into law the Bill implementing the Tasmanian Forests Agreement 2012 is momentous. We have a situation far different from that resulting from the Helsham Inquiry or the passage of the RFA, in which bureaucracy and/or political expediency sought to impose a solution to the “forest wars” – a sure recipe for dissension by those groups considering themselves hard done by. History has shown repeatedly that such an approach doesn’t work.

A very relevant question which will certainly occur to you all is whether the existence of a negotiated position forged between old enemies is going to be a real game-changer. Will the greenies be genuinely satisfied with the amount of forest proposed to be reserved and cease attacks, market-based and otherwise, on the remaining industry? Will industry players be satisfied with their reduced access and get on with developing their businesses within the redefined sustainability limits? And if all these things occur, will people start being happier with each other and start to form a more cohesive and can-do society? Or will everything just fall apart – just more of the same?

Of course I can’t answer any of these questions definitively. But I do suggest that the vast majority of greenies *would* be satisfied with protection of over 500,000ha, within which are virtually all the iconic areas they have fought for over the decades. They will be *especially* satisfied if the remaining industry also reforms its practices in a way enabling FSC certification, as envisaged by the agreement. The ENGO signatories to the agreement actually do represent a large proportion of potential activists – and while internal ENGO discussions have been robust over the three-year period of negotiations, most member groups have realised both the necessity for an agreement with

industry and the fact that the negotiated numbers are the best anyone could do, and better than that, they are actually *very good* from the conservation viewpoint.

As far as industry people go, most have agreed that while they wouldn't downsize by choice, market factors have ensured that they already have, agreement or no agreement. They have grasped the fact that defusing the ongoing clash with greenies and giving much more attention to real sustainability – the things which can lead to peaceful work places, certification of product and reliable markets – is far preferable to staggering on in the current chaos.

There have been and still will be conservationist voices insisting that there are much better ways to “do forestry” – generally citing overseas practice - and complaining that the agreement doesn't address this, instead perpetuating the old idea that “Tasmanian” practice is essentially a standoff between warring parties. I'd have to agree with them that we probably have things to learn from other countries and also that we should as a community spend more time talking to each other about the best ways to do things. With genuine inclusiveness and goodwill.

But I am convinced that implementing the present agreement is the essential first step. With it in place any battles will be much fewer and smaller, and with industry aiming at certification and a genuine social licence (as they must do to survive) we will in a *de facto* sense move towards what those critics want, despite no explicit provisions in the agreement.

Whether a *rapprochement* between greenies and industry will lead to a genuinely cohesive society is incapable of reliable prediction. I am however optimistic. While people's opinions are all over the place at the moment while the agreement is touch and go and the shape of the future industry unknown, I think we will all soon come to realise that things are gradually getting better. And a trickle will then turn to a flood. And I suggest that without this agreement and its legal implementation we have no chance whatsoever.

So the implementation of the Forests Agreement remains something of an experiment. But an experiment for which we have never had the opportunity before. And one for which we will never have the opportunity again. One failure will be too many. The wheels will never again align.

The key to achieving these real positives is for the Legislative Council to implement the spirit of the signatories' agreement in its entirety. Some amendments to the enabling Bill may indeed be desirable, but only to reflect more closely the parties' intent. If you meddle with the big picture some or all of the signatories will feel the need to walk away from the whole thing.

And we will be back to square one. With absolutely nowhere to go.

I therefore urge the Committee and the Council to use their best endeavours when considering the Bill before them to pass it and so give effect to this historically unique initiative.