

To the Senate Inquiry into forestry and mining operations on the Tiwi Islands

The Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts
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Please accept my submission to the Senate inquiry regarding the **forestry** operations on the Tiwi Islands.

I am a wood worker with 30 years experience in carpentry, furniture design/manufacture and teaching, both privately and at university. I ran my own furniture design and making business before setting up a furniture design workshop at the University of Technology, Sydney. I have been running the Wood Technology Studio at the Faculty of Architecture, University of Sydney since 2000 where I teach and research timber related design and construction and sustainability issues related to materials.

Over the last 2 years I have also been working with Health Habitat on Housing for Health projects, surveying and fixing aboriginal housing in rural and remote areas including Cape York Peninsula. In 2008 I spent 2 weeks in Nguiu, Bathurst Island on one of these projects, during which time I discussed the Melville Island plantations with many people I met.

The main focus of my submission is Terms of Reference "e" - an examination of the prospects for alternative economic development opportunities and impediments for the Tiwi Islands ..."

This submission will concentrate primarily on alternative forestry approaches adopted or trialed by indigenous communities in the Pacific and northern Australia, on their successes and challenges and the implications for Tiwi Islanders should they consider exploring these options. While this submission does not discuss *non*-forest options such as carbon credits and eco-tourism the type of forestry proposed would be complementary to these options.

Before beginning to discuss these alternatives, however, I would like to make the following points:

It is the Tiwi Islanders themselves who should be the decision makers about what happens to their land. It is essential - for the ongoing success of any scheme, the health of the environment and perhaps most importantly, to ensure social cohesion and equity – that all Tiwi Islanders, men and women, be offered comprehensive information about alternatives and consulted in depth, on country and in language.

The decision about which way to then proceed should be made by the whole community, not just those clans whose land is being cleared for plantation, as the whole community's way of life and environment is impacted. The size of the plantation is large enough to affect the neighbouring homelands and microclimate; loss of endangered plants and animals within plantation areas is a loss for the whole Tiwi island population; the clans whose lands are now occupied by plantation will need to relocate to townships permanently and rely on other clans to meet their customary obligations and source forest products.

One hundred Tiwi Island women have made it clear through a petition¹ to Federal Parliament that they *do* indeed wish to be fully consulted about what happens to their land and are appalled by the clearing of their native forest to date - because of the consequent loss of foods, materials for artworks, ceremonial places and culture, income generation and the loss to future generations. Tiwi Islanders consider their relation to the land to be that of caretaker – personal self worth is directly related to the ability to take good care of the land

¹ The petition is reprinted at the end of this submission

for the next generation. The women note that they have no representation on the Tiwi Land Council to enable them to challenge the mis-use of their land. They say that most Tiwi have received no financial benefit either from the sale of the timber from their forests, from royalties or from jobs.

The current clearing and acacia planting is also having an enormous **environmental** impact.

The Tiwi Islands forest contain special values including:

“the highest density of rainforest patches in the Northern Territory, and two rainforest types not known elsewhere. Eucalypt forests are better developed (highest basal area, canopy height) in this bioregion than elsewhere in northern Australia. The Tiwi Islands contains "treeless plain" vegetation, without parallel on the NT mainland.”

Website Bioregional Audit, Department of Natural Resources, Environment, The Arts and Sport, Northern Territory

It is this exceptional eucalypt forest and treeless plain vegetation that has been and continues to be cleared for plantations though some rainforest areas have also been “accidentally” destroyed in the last few years and has been the subject of government enquiry with some financial compensations paid to landowners.

The **economic** loss from the plantation project for the Tiwi Islanders is huge: from the sale of hundreds of thousands of dollars of timber removed from their land they have apparently received only \$75,000;² they have received a much lower lease rate than paid to non-indigenous owners in southern states; the loss of potential revenue through food collection, forest products, ecoforestry and carbon credit sales if the forest had remained, has yet to be estimated.

Alternatives to the current clearing and plantation cropping on the Tiwi Islands

I would like to begin by telling the story of the timber we purchase for the Architecture Faculty at the University of Sydney, 90% of which comes from community based forestry projects, primarily in Papua New Guinea with a small percentage from the Solomon Islands. We have been purchasing this timber for about 8 years. The timber has either Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification or is Community Based Fair Trade (CBFT), that is, from communities working toward FSC Certification.

Our ability to connect with these communities and purchase their timber has only been possible because of the FSC process and chain of custody networks.

Community based forestry and FSC certification in PNG and the Solomon Islands

Communities in PNG began developing small scale forestry in the late 1980's as an alternative to the large-scale industrial forestry projects which were clearfell logging 60,000 to 80,000 hectares per annum with little return to the communities who held customary rights. (Since 1996 timber exports have been averaging between 2 to 2.5 million cubic metres per year (p66 Sizer et al) and 70% of the total timber resource in PNG has been allocated to the timber industry (p108 Cashore et al)

Initially community forestry was taken up primarily to keep timber rights within the community and to provide for their own uses – timber for houses, schools, aid posts, churches, and meeting houses with a small quantity sold locally. A survey in 1993 estimated 1500 portable mills in operation, with most communities harvesting 3-4 trees (ie around 3-4 cubic metres) per week. (Bun + Schevyns p10). The environmental impacts were minimal as mills were carried by hand or on bullock and the timber sawn in situ and carried out, rather than requiring large roads to be built for trucks.

In 1993 the Forest Stewardship Council was set up by a group of timber traders, environment groups and indigenous people's groups to develop standards for sustainable and socially just forestry practices that

² Sylvatech cleared 4150 hectares in 2004, producing 5-40 cubic metres of sawlog per hectare. Sales from this harvest included export of veneer logs, indicating some very high quality logs were obtained and sold. Pentarch Forest Products, the company marketing the timber from the cleared land advertised an initial volume of 40,000 m³ for sale: “a rare opportunity given the aesthetic and durability qualities of the timber and its relative rarity outside the island” (40,000 m³ represents around 9m³ per hectare on 4150 ha). Larger areas of land were cleared in subsequent years. Information about the proceeds from these sales and why the Tiwi Islanders did not receive any funds at all until the day of the Senate Estimates inquiry in Nov 2006 - still needs investigation.

would be recognised internationally with a logo and labelling system for products coming from these forests. Several Papua New Guineans from community based not-for-profit forestry projects attended the foundation meeting and played a formative role. FSC certification offered an opportunity to maintain small scale community controlled forestry methods but also build external support and marketing networks which would enable a greater cash return to the community.

The FSC developed a Standard for sustainable forestry with 10 principles and 61 criteria. FSC certification is awarded by third party independent auditors accredited by the FSC when the forest management group can demonstrate they have complied with all FSC principles and criteria. Annual audits are conducted to ensure ongoing compliance

The FSC also established a process to certify companies who deal with FSC products – those who buy and sell timber, make furniture, paper or build with FSC timbers. These companies must be able to demonstrate to the FSC auditors that they have a system which can follow every single piece of timber they buy and sell. Once their process is approved, they will receive a Chain of Custody (CoC) certificate. For the end user this is important as it is only through a continuous verifiable chain of custody that they can be certain that their purchase is genuine. For details about FSC certification see the FSC website.

In 1994 the first of these communities in Bainings, Rabaul attained Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) Certification of 12,500 hectares, with the support of a local NGO and B+Q, a large UK hardware chain. This provided the community with an export market and cash base for some of their product.

It was a significant achievement as FSC certification is a demanding process involving the development of detailed maps and records identifying ownership, high conservation areas, sacred sites, trees and areas to be protected for the full range of community uses including food, medicines, clothing, rituals, seed for future trees, and for wildlife support. The process also requires extensive stakeholder consultation which must be fully recorded and transparent, management plans detailing the harvesting routes and methods, tree marking, all verified by the auditor.

While the Bainings community was forced to relinquish their certificate several years later, other communities have succeeded in achieving FSC certification with 38,000 ha of forest now certified in PNG.

All communities have required financial support to develop the forestry management processes required by FSC and also meet the expenses needed for auditing. There has been little government support and most assistance has come from local and mainly Dutch environmental and legal NGOs, religious organisations, the European Union and timber traders. This help has not always been consistent and in 2003 FORCERT was founded as the first FSC group certification in PNG, reducing costs, providing training and business management for its members.

However, there have been many benefits including a premium price for their value added products and a guaranteed market for the timber. Most of the timber has been exported to Australia and New Zealand where there is a small but rapidly growing market for FSC timber. An aspect of sustainable forestry is the logging of a broader range of species, many of which will be relatively unknown in foreign markets. However, the market demand for FSC certificated timber has meant that people are willing to experiment with unfamiliar species and developed ways to successfully use these timbers.

The minimal impact on environment has led some to see FSC certified forestry as a cost effective method of conservation and argue that governments should provide far greater financial support to communities on this basis. (p15 Hunt) The limited support from the PNG government to date for FSC certification has come from the Department of Environment and Conservation rather than forestry. (p13 Bun+Schevyns)

Since the Forest Stewardship Council was formed a number of other certification schemes have been developed with their own principles and criteria. Many of these are national schemes developed primarily between industry and governments. Such national schemes have been developed in Indonesia, Malaysia and Australia in the last few years.

However, the Forest Stewardship Council FSC is the most universally recognised by consumers worldwide and the only scheme recognised by most international environmental groups, including the World Wide Fund for Nature, Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth. The FSC has a structure based on equal participation from its 3 chambers – economic, environmental and social chambers. This structure is required at every level, from the executive board to the small community in the forest. This mix of equal representation has been one of the strengths of FSC and fundamental to its acceptance across industry, environmental and indigenous

groups. The FSC standards and processes are under continual review to ensure issues are discussed openly with decisions achieved through consensus.

The social chamber is made up of people directly involved in the forests – the indigenous people who own, work or have customary rights to the land, the people who work in the forests and those who live and work nearby. It can also involve teachers, scientists and others who have a social interest and involvement with the land. In a few countries, such as Canada, a fourth chamber has been created for indigenous people to ensure their voice has sufficient weight. Each country is required to develop its own National Standard which identifies locally specific indicators to assess whether the forest management process is meeting the FSC criteria.

FSC certification system is also different from other certification schemes in that its principles and criteria recognise indigenous people's *rights*.

FSC Principle 3 states:

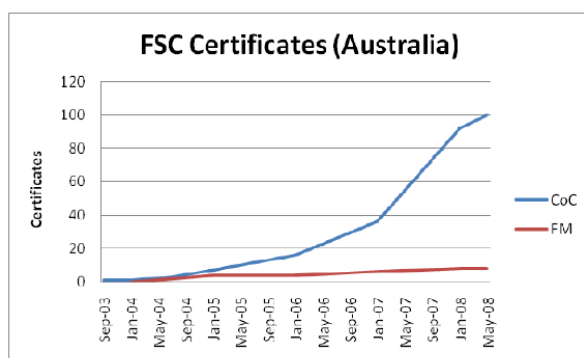
“The legal and customary rights of indigenous peoples to own, use and manage their lands, territories and resources shall be recognised and protected.”

FSC also recognises intellectual property rights of indigenous peoples and requires:

that they shall be compensated for the application of their traditional knowledge regarding the use of forest species or management systems in forest systems. This compensation shall be formerly agreed upon with their free and informed consent before forest operations commence.”

FSC Timber certification is now widespread, especially in Europe, North and South America. FSC certified forests represent the equivalent of 7% of the world's productive forests with 106 million hectares of forest worldwide FSC certified in 81 countries. Over 13,000 companies hold Chain of Custody (CoC) certificates. FSC is the fastest growing forest certification system in the world (UN FAO, 2007). Many multinational corporations have committed to purchasing FSC timber including one of the largest furniture manufacturing companies in the world, IKEA, and the world's largest wood buyers, Home Depot and Lowes (USA). The value of FSC labelled sales is estimated at over 20 billion USD.³

While FSC was slow to start in Australia, there has been a rapid increase in all sectors since the launch of FSC Australia 3 years ago. From a handful of companies in 2006 there are now (Feb,09) 160 companies with Chain of Custody certificates including some of Australia's largest timber, veneer and paper companies such as Timbercorp Forestry Pty Ltd, Carter Holt Harvey Woodproducts, Le Messurier Timber Co. Pty Ltd, Briggs Veneers, George Fethers & Co Trading Pty Ltd, The Laminex Group, Australian Paper Corporation, AMCOR Australasia, Paperlinx Merchating (Spicers, Dalton) and Fuji Xerox Australia



FSC Australia News Release 7.5.08

Forests management certification has been slower - There are currently 8 Forest Management certificates covering 529,078 hectares in Australia. Seven of these are exotic pine plantation; 2/3 for paper, 1/3 for sawlog.

So far Australian Sustainable Timbers (AST) is the only non-plantation forest manager to have achieved FSC certification in Australia. AST is a group of private forest owners in the Hunter Valley, New South Wales.

³ FSC website <http://www.fsc.org/facts-figures.html>

They were part of a farm forestry network for several years before deciding to work toward certification. The farms range from 72 to 900 hectares and have different histories. Two are now FSC certified and eventually all 10 hope to be certified.

Demand for FSC certified timber is also increasing in Australia, in part due to the Green Building Council of Australia's Greenstar program – a program which evaluates building in regard to their environmental performance and awards up to 6 stars for international excellence. Credits are awarded on the basis of how they meet various criteria – the timber credit is awarded if the timber is guaranteed to be recycled or has FSC certification. At this stage FSC is the only certification scheme recognised by Greenstar. (Other similar schemes in the USA and UK also recognise only FSC certification.)

Architects in Australia are increasingly aware of and specifying FSC timber: *Infolink* a popular specification tool for architects has had articles recommending FSC; the Australian Institute of Architects ran a national seminar series in 2008 to inform architects about timber certification and FSC; several significant buildings have recently been completed in Australia using FSC certified timber including the Melbourne Convention Centre which was clad internally in panels of FSC certified MDF (Alpine industries) with AST veneers. Architects are also completing FSC houses (eg Danny Broe Architect) and offices (eg Caroline Pidcock, Resource 88) using FSC certified timber and joinery. Eight joinery companies making doors and windows are now listed on the FSC website as well as several large furniture manufacturers. (Town + Country; Schamburg and Alvisse). The Greenpeace Australia website has a Good Wood Guide website recommending FSC timber.

Advantages of small scale community based forestry for the Tiwi islanders

Community based eco forestry similar to the model developed in PNG could be a successful alternative to plantation forestry in the Tiwi Islands bringing a far greater range of benefits to the community, the environment, the Australian forest industry and timber consumers.

Unlike plantations forests are retained in all their diversity as are all current uses including :

1. **Sacred and ceremonial sites, hunting, fishing and collection of bush tucker foods.** Family and clan based forest living in all its aspects relating to forest are maintained including customs, respect and relationship with the land.
2. **Traditional wood related uses** are maintained including seeking, selecting and harvesting timber for ceremonies, rituals, hunting and fishing. Funerals are a very important part of Tiwi culture and the full rituals associated with funerals can take many weeks including the creation of pukumani poles and tunga.
3. Traditional wood and NON-wood uses including continuing source of **materials for art and craft based industries** are maintained. Art and craft is highly significant to the culture, self-esteem, employment and income of the Tiwis. The Tiwi Island arts related businesses are some of the most significant and successful in Australia, with a truly extraordinary output per capita. A population of just 2,500 has produced 5 successful businesses/art centres on the islands providing training, workshop, equipment and gallery space, selling to visiting tourists as well as to outlets around Australia and internationally. At Nguiu, Bathurst Is., Tiwi Designs (textile, printing, pima art, poster/paper) and BimaWear (textiles and clothing) have been continually running since the 1960s. On Melville Island there are three centres: Jilamara at Milikapiti and Manupi at Pirlagimpi. Originally intended as a museum, the Keeping place, designed by Peter Myers with ceilings magnificently painted by 8 Tiwi Artists is now the home of Ngaruwanajirri (helping one another) artists with disability. Artists there also produce linocut screen prints, carvings and recently batik.

The arts produced at or through these centres is a vital part of the Tiwi economy – not only direct employment at centres like BimaWear and workshop space for artists at Tiwi Designs but also outlets for many artists, men and women producing artworks in their homes which they sell through the centres. During my brief visit to Nguiu I met several artists working in their homes including a woman basket weaver, whose rich yellow dye was made from boiling a special root collected from the forest and a male artist making timber pole and other carvings using a mixture of traditional and modern tools on his veranda.

With the exception of the silkscreen printing enterprises most of the artworks made on the Tiwi Islands use natural materials derived from the forest and include timber, especially bloodwood and ironwood for poles and carving, pandanus for baskets, root dyes and Cape Fourcroy ochres, bees wax and other natural resins and glues, feathers, arbus berries, stringybark for tunga and shells.

Small scale eco-forestry can also provide materials for local building needs

Small scale eco-forestry using, for example, portable mills to process timber into planks can provide other timber products for local use including housing, public buildings and furniture. While most buildings on the islands are now made with metal frames and cladding early buildings were all made from timber, primarily cypress and timber components are still used in many houses. There are successful timber structures including the church buildings at Nguiu, built in 1941 from cypress pine (*Callitris*) - still in excellent condition. As noted, several of the species on the Islands are extremely durable and also noted for their termite resistance. Produce from the Injanoo sawmill, CYP, is primarily intended for housing and are envisaged to replace expensive imports from the East coast and elsewhere. An average house uses 10-15 m³ timber (framing, joists, beams, battens, bearers, floorboards, stair treads mouldings) so this will be a considerable saving to the Injanoo community.

There is very little furniture in many of the houses in Nguiu. Some houses sole furniture pieces were examples of the cypress/ plywood furniture made several decades before in the Nguiu timber workshop. The church contains some very interesting pieces of locally made furniture. Several people expressed an interest in restarting this furniture making enterprise which they saw as providing good jobs for local people.

Other uses for lesser quality timbers and sections of trees would be fencing and landscaping, temporary bush/beach camps and firewood.

Viability of small scale ecoforestry in the Tiwi Islands.

Small scale eco-forestry enterprises can develop just to supply local demand, though many will also try to develop external markets.

The Solomon Island model has a harvesting rate of around 3-4 trees per hectare every 5 years (R. Scheyvens). In PNG around 3-4 trees per ha are harvested approximately every 20 years. While it is possible to cut 4-6 m³ per day with the portable mills used in PNG, in reality the felling and sawing rate is more like 1 m³ of sawn timber (1 large tree) per week due to travelling to and from the site, hauling timber and equipment, saw sharpening, training, timber stacking for drying as well as other demands on community time.

Site selection, mapping, and inventories will need to be undertaken to ascertain the rate of harvesting which will be sustainable in the Tiwi Islands. These rates will vary considerably with variations in soil quality, rainfall, tree cover, environmental protection requirements and community needs for the land for other uses (hunting, artefact materials, sacred places, etc). Research will also be required to evaluate the range of timber species, their suitability for harvesting, (size, defects, etc) tree yield and their marketability.

The emphasis in a FSC model would be extraction which does not diminish the diversity or quality of forest species. For example, log selection and extraction cannot remove only the best trees of the most popular species but must leave high quality trees for seed production and harvest a mixture of species to maintain diversity. In this respect this form of forestry is quite different from the selective logging historically used in Australia.

Little research appears to have been undertaken into either (a) the type of forestry the Tiwi Islanders themselves might be interested in or (b) the suitability of the forest for different types of forestry. However a number of research projects have been carried out into the viability of small scale logging projects utilising these species on the west coast of Cape York Peninsula (CYP) over the last 8 years.

Tyron Venn, one of the researchers in CYP, spent 3 years between 2000 -2003 with the Wik around the Aurukun region in CYP. Venn's key research areas were to determine

- the overall objectives of various groups
- the type of forestry desired by the various groups within the community (as well as the views of outside interest groups including Balkanu, environment and industry groups)

- which types of forestry would be most viable
- and would best meet the objectives

Clearly aboriginal communities around Australia have very different histories, customary and forestry practices, needs and objectives. Nevertheless, Venn's research raises issues which may have bearing for the Tiwi Islanders and may be useful in forming the basis for discussion and further research with the Tiwi.

In Venn's study, Initial timber options considered ranged from selling rights to 'outsiders' to harvest land for woodchip, to minimal processing (such as round log production for telegraph poles and fencing), to further value-adding by the community through sawn timber production, various forms of drying and chemical treatments, strip flooring and furniture manufacture. .

Modelling community objectives against these options showed the best option for the Wik was sawn timber and air drying rather than more capital intensive or higher end processing options. This was in part due to the importance placed on employment generation:

Employment generation is the highest priority objective of elders. They want forestry to provide meaningful, culturally appropriate and adequately-paid jobs for a high proportion of their able-bodied working-age population. Elders believe the provision of meaningful forestry employment and the sale of products to 'outsiders' will have many psychological benefits for their people, particularly in raising self esteem, pride, confidence, and hope for the future. Although generation of any type of employment is considered desirable, employment *on country* is of particular importance because it is considered culturally appropriate, may encourage population decentralisation (and improve social order in town) by providing employment for people at outstations, and may facilitate better connection of young people with *country*

Venn, Visions and Realities for a Wik Forestry Industry on Cape York Peninsula, Australia, p441

Jobs also appear to have been an important incentive to the Tiwi Islanders in agreeing to Sylvatech's plantation proposal. However, the Sylvatech and Great Southern Limited plantations have offered few jobs to the Tiwi Islanders. During the first 6 years only three local indigenous people were employed by Sylvatech, (John Hicks evidence to Senate estimates committee reported in "Tiwi Islands logging under fire" by Rosslyn Beeby, The Canberra Times, 27.8.2007) despite the company stating during the negotiation process that jobs would form an important benefit for the community with Tiwi Islanders ultimately forming half the workforce. National protest and publicity seem to have led to further jobs being created, though not, a significant number. By August 2008, of an estimated 230 jobs, there were only "20 Tiwi islanders on the company payroll" (p33 Findson).

Also important is the type of learning and employment opportunities provided. Will training in native forest clearing and single (exotic) species plantation management provide Tiwi islanders with the employment and training they want? Community owned and developed eco-forestry has the potential to create a very diverse range of jobs in both content and working arrangements which can build on traditional use and possibly combine with new skills and technologies to provide new products and opportunities.

Amber Colhoun describes an important learning exchange which occurred in the Lake Murray project in PNG between elders, using traditional leaf and line pictures on ground to map boundaries and significant features, and the younger generation using GPS to locate the picture maps as they walked the country. The process, an essential step in developing sustainable forestry management plans created an opportunity for both generations to learn from each other and record traditional knowledge.

Women in the Solomon Islands expressed interest in silviculture and in working on creating the forest inventories, auditing and management plans that form an important part of the work of FSC forest management. (R.Schevyns, p449); other women working with VDT in PNG were interested in business and book-keeping jobs within the ecoforestry project and have trained in basic business management.

In PNG and SI an important aspect of ecoforestry is the flexibility of working arrangements. As the projects are community based they recognise community needs including attendance at funerals, festivals and ceremonies, complimentary forms of income generation including hunting, fishing collection of art materials and art manufacture.

Suitability of Tiwi Island species for selective ecoforestry harvesting for sawn timber

The dominant species in the plantation area are Darwin Stringybark (*Eucalyptus tetradonta*), Darwin Woollybutt (*Eucalyptus miniata*), and Melville Island Bloodwood. (*Corymbia nesophila*). Blood wood and more recently "Ironwood" (*Erythrophleum Chlorostachys*) are the main species used by the Tiwi for wood carving and pukamani poles. (Barnes p41, Tiwi Women's petition) Also present are northern cypress-pine (*Callitris intratropica*) and the tall palm (*Gronophyllum ramsayi*).

Darwin Stringybark, Melville Island Bloodwood and Cooktown Ironwood are the predominant species on west CYP. As part of his CYP research, Venn conducted surveys with potential consumers of the timber to determine market acceptance and pricing. It would seem that there was significant interest in Darwin Stringybark for a number of uses ranging from furniture to structural purposes. Ironwood would attract a premium rate as it is highly prized by furniture and musical instrument makers. There was less certainty about Bloodwood, due to the presence of gum veins.

The Injanoo Community, together with The Queensland Forestry Research Institute (QFRI), conducted a small scale milling project in 2002 at Injanoo NW CYP (Bragg, Annandale and Venn) to determine the viability of a small ongoing industry. The project provided training to around 20 people in chainsaw and portable saw mill operation, determined recovery rates, basic wood property information and potential products. Research showed that both Darwin Stringybark and Melville island Bloodwood had a durability class 1 – the most durable timber rating available - indicating that such timber will last 50 years in the ground. Very few Australian or international timbers have this rating.

While the properties of the same species can vary considerably when grown in different locations and climates it is likely that the Darwin Stringybark, Melville Is. Bloodwood and Ironwood on the Tiwi Islands will have fairly similar properties and market value. That Sylvatech was able to sell veneer logs during their first year of operation on the Tiwi Islands suggests there is very high quality timber available from these lands.

The main obstacle in marketing these species is lack of market familiarity and awareness of these timbers.

Advantages FSC certification may bring to an eco-forestry project on the Tiwi Islands

FSC certification can provide access to networks and markets which the community would not be able to access otherwise. FSC chain of custody links primary producers through manufactures to final consumers and so provides **authentification** and marketing networks.

FSC Certification:

- may aid the authentification of aboriginal cultural arts and crafts where these are produced from FSC materials. (Whitehead et al for example note that timber is regularly stolen from aboriginal land in NT to make didgeridoos – an FSC logo, like the Fair trade logo will assist buyers know the article is genuine).
- connect to the growing Green Building market seeking guaranteed sustainable products; there is very little FSC timber, especially hardwood, available in Australian and the demand for it is rapidly growing.
- may lead to higher value markets. This will be dependent on timber species and skills in timber processing and it is important communities are realistic about the quality of material they can produce and the transport costs associated with reaching these markets. Nevertheless, selling timber for high value products such as furniture and joinery will bring a higher return than for fencing and structural uses.
- will provide access to markets, despite the unfamiliarity of buyers to unknown species, because of their willingness to trial sustainable, community based timber. As mentioned earlier, an important issue for FSC certification is an awareness in the market that it is necessary to try new **species** as, by definition, sustainable forestry requires harvesting a mixture of species. Many of the traders, manufacturers, builders and other users along the Chain of custody have been willing to experiment and work toward building a common knowledge about the properties of various species and their suitability for different uses. The first joinery company to gain FSC CoC certification in Australia, Hampton and Laarson, after testing many species found Taun to be excellent for doors and

windows; Malas produces a wonderful internal flooring, at Sydney University we have been using many wonderful species from PNG that we would never otherwise have known about and for a variety of uses. Celtis and cheesewood, for example, we have found to have properties similar to the traditional patternmaking timbers and are now using these for modelmaking and our computer operated milling machinery.

This is an important issue for the Tiwi community should they attempt to commercialise an ecoforestry enterprise as few people outside the region are familiar with even the dominant species, let alone the minor species. Historically the Australian building and furniture making industries have generally been very conservative in their approach to timber selection and the majority of species used in both industries overwhelmingly remains the exotic species favoured since colonial times, despite the marvellous breadth of species we have in this country. Of course, ultimately the timber will still need to contain properties and be of a quality suitable to the uses required by end purchasers.

FSC certification is **supported by major international environment groups**. WWF and Rainforest Alliance worked with timber traders and indigenous peoples to develop the FSC certification scheme in the early 1990s. Greenpeace has actively supported FSC for the past 10 years, (including working with indigenous communities to establish FSC forestry projects in PNG and the Solomon Islands. All environment groups in Australia recognise FSC certification with ACF, tWS and FoE representation on the FSC-Australia board. Once FSC certification of an aboriginal forestry project is achieved this should ensure smooth operation with no disputes about environmental impact. Auditing is an ongoing process (usually once per year for forest management certificates and management practice must be maintained to FSC standards.

As in PNG and the Solomon Islands, FSC certification **may provide avenues for receiving technical and financial support** to develop forestry, timber milling, business skills and the skills required by the FSC process (consultation, mapping, recording, silviculture etc). FSC provides a guarantee of environmental sustainability and social justice to groups and organisations wishing to invest, donate or support such projects.

FSC certification requires participation of all Stakeholders, consultation and transparency.

FSC certification requires a formal process of consultation and management planning with thorough recording and documentation of meetings. This can be done within the community or with external advisors but if FSC is to be applied for, rigorous record must be kept. This can be arduous but provides legitimacy, transparency and avoids disputes later. Some communities in PNG took many years to get their certification because they could not show this aspect of their process and were required to re-consult with all – community, environmental and industry stakeholders (Bun and Bewang).

Involving a whole community in participatory decision making can be extremely difficult, perhaps especially in a community like the Tiwi Islands. It may also be considered a negative by some communities - as outside interference from a global entity. Nevertheless such a process works against unfair influence of some stakeholders and possible corruption. It is also an important guarantee of ethical and fair process to those who might be prepared to provide financial support such as environment groups and charities (as in PNG and the Solomon Islands), super funds (as in the FSC plantations in southern Australia) and governments.

Cultural recording is an integral and required part of the FSC certification process. This includes **passing on knowledge of country to younger member of the community and others**.

FSC not only **recognises indigenous rights and knowledge** but requires aboriginal input into any forestry agreements seeking FSC certification. At the Managing Forest Country Workshop at ANU last year concern was expressed that the skills aboriginal people learned always seemed to be the ones that were disappearing in the developing job market. One of the biggest growth areas this century is likely to be in green jobs and green research. Acquiring the skills needed to work within the most stringent, independently verifiable certification scheme in the world should provide long term job opportunities and aboriginal people will have the additional highly **specialised skills** required by the Indigenous Rights Principle. While the skills learnt will be well used on the Tiwi Islands and on country they should be transferable to any other forest project seeking FSC certification in Australia.

FSC Australia has established a committee of 3 aboriginal people to build an engagement process between aboriginal people and FSC Australia

The importance of non-timber products: FSC certification takes a “whole of land” starting point rather than timber as its starting point. It is essential to start by assessing what the whole community wants to get from project and includes non timber values and products, ie marketable products as well as nonmarketable values such as sacred sites, transport, tools, hunting, fishing, other foods, laws, places, pathways. FSC is about sustainable management of whole forests and so can cover any forest products such as honey, oils, musical instruments, paints, dyes, glues.

It is unclear whether there is currently a **price premium** for FSC timber on the Australian market. However, as demand grows and availability increases it is very likely the price will rise. There have been considerable financial benefits for PNG and Solomons Island communities who are producing FSC timber in that they are selling higher value products to a foreign market and selling directly through their own organisations. The group supporting FSC certification in the Solomon Islands was offering up to SBD\$1,200 per cubic metre for sawn timber, compared to around only SBD\$35 per cubic metre that the logging companies paid for round logs. (Schevyns, R.) Similarly Aboriginal communities should receive a considerable increase in return from the sale of high value sawn hardwood compared to the lease of land for woodchip. The wood chip future is very uncertain with demand for wood chip falling and world wide oversupply predicted by forestry consulting firms.

Dealing directly with buyers will help avoid the problems the Tiwi Islanders have so far faced in not being compensated for the very large volumes of timber removed from their land and apparently sold to China and other parts of Asia by Sylvatech and Pentarch Forest Products.

Recommendations

- That the senate inquiry conducts hearings from the Tiwi Islanders, on country and in language and that every step be taken to ensure all Tiwi Islanders have access to the inquiry.
- That the sale of hardwood by Sylvatech, Petarch and Great southern plantations, cleared from land owned by the Tiwi Islanders, be investigated to discover why the Tiwi Islanders have not been compensated for this timber.
- That no further clearing for plantations be permitted and that independent environmental impact assessments be made before any forest enterprises be considered.
- That Federal Government and Territory funds be made available for research into alternative forestry and non timber options for the Tiwi Islands. That this research be based at the Tiwi Islands with full participation of the islanders themselves in order that they can have a valuable input into the research and make informed decisions about their future; that the women as well as the men of the Tiwi Islands fully participate in all research and inquiries, meetings and decisions with a view to their full participation and potential employment in any enterprises which result.
- That Forest Stewardship Council Certification be one option investigated and put forward to the Tiwi Islanders to consider when researching these options.

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Tiwi Island Women's petition

We, the undersigned, are women of the Tiwi Islands and we would like to express our concerns over the clearing of our native forests.

We are concerned for our future generations.

Our forests provide not only food source/bush tucker for our people but also our ceremonial items and craft. Ironwood and Bloodwood for carving spears and Turtini/Pukumani poles for ceremony, Stringybark for Tunga (bark baskets) for ceremony. Pandanus for basket weaving and various other plants for dyes.

You may be aware that ours is traditionally a matriarchal society although our voices are seldom heard.

We have no representation on the Tiwi Land Council.

We are not consulted properly and never in Tiwi language.

We hear promises of jobs and financial benefits for our people, yet have not seen any results.

Most Tiwi do not benefit from royalty payments.

In the meantime our forests are still being cleared at a fast rate.

Our call is to stop clearing Tiwi land.

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