

Submission to the Inquiry into the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area

My name is Keith Thompson, I come to this issue as a dedicated Tasmanian (all my 64 years in Tasmania), a parent and grandparent, and as someone trained and experienced in taking an economic perspective on government decisions. I see only good coming from the extended boundaries and only bad from going backwards. This makes it absolutely inexplicable to me why anyone would oppose, and now be advocating de-listing, the recent additions. There can be no question that the extensions in question, limited as they are, represent a hugely important addition to the existing World Heritage. They add wonderful features to make a more complete representation of Heritage values. These are very well documented with powerful arguments that stand up pretty well to detailed scrutiny. I believe that any counter arguments must rely on something other than fact and I know that some of the recent commentary has been a little careless with the facts.

But why this counter argument, where is it coming from and what is motivating it? I reckon this question needs to be at the core of the Committee's work.

On the one hand we have the ability to get massive gains in the preservation of Heritage values. People that don't see that as a sufficient reason on its own could consider the impact of broadcasting these outstanding values to the world - appreciated the world over and motivating growing numbers of people to want to see the home of this magnificent Heritage. The economic opportunities and social benefits in regional Tasmania far outweigh any alternative land use. The increasingly important tourism market is real; it creates real jobs, real growth and real opportunities for community development. And tourism will not flourish in a degraded environment.

If this isn't enough we now have the prospect of the maintenance of a new peace in the forests, cooperation over new directions for the state including a modern and sustainable forest based industry that can actually sell its product to an increasingly discerning world market, and the growth of new attitudes that value working together for the good of the community. This is hugely

significant for Tasmania where division, argument and distrust have torn communities apart and where massive amounts of Government money have gone into propping up wasteful, unsustainable and uneconomic activity. And far from benefitting the State, our public subsidies to ridiculously outdated industrial processes such as we had had in the forests have helped prolong the persistence of a sub- culture that devalues learning, devalues cleverness and devalues progress; one that sees conspiracy where a more moderate view would see enthusiasm, striving and optimism. It is not surprising that we continuously lament cultural barriers to literacy and learning and the appalling outcomes they produce.

So I ask the question. What is in it for people wanting not only to limit the gains but now to go backwards? What motivates people to see this decision to extend the boundaries as so abhorrent that it has to be reversed?

I don't know the answer. It would be terrible if it was just about base politics but that so far looks the only possibility. Some people do see political benefit in attacking something they can pretend has been imposed by an international body. Some see political benefit in conflict over forests – they already mourn the loss of conflict and the opportunities that provides them. For them anything that wrecks the forest agreement, irrespective of the cost to society, industry and government would be worthwhile. It is hard to imagine people being so selfish, so negative and so destructive but I think that is something the Committee has to be prepared to consider in responding to its terms of reference.

Keith Thompson