

SUBMISSION No. 108
Inquiry into the Australian forestry industry

PUBLIC NATIVE FOREST TRANSITION INQUIRY

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The purpose of my submission is to draw the attention of the Legislative Council and the Tasmanian and the Federal Governments to a virtually ignored aspect of the current forestry turmoil.

Let me establish from the outset, that the ultimatum of “EITHER native forest logging OR monoculture tree plantations (plus the Tamar Valley pulp mill)” is a short sighted, unprofessional concept that does not reflect state of the art forestry and general social and economic policies.

It is akin to requesting people to make a choice between EITHER a marathon run OR a crawl on all fours, ignoring the solution of simply walking.

Much is being written and said about various aspects of Tasmanian forestry activities, but the fundamentals are never seriously addressed. A cacophony of contradicting demands dominates the debate. Short-term measures and single issue fixes are proposed and rejected, and an excessive haggle for Government support from various sides dominates the scene.

What is consistently missing is a sober analysis of the legal framework underlying the entire forest and wood sector of Tasmanian public life.

The messy, confused and often uncivilised public and professional debate is a direct result of a legislative forestry framework that is seriously deficient and not only allows this situation to persist, but actually forces the hand of some players in a way that leads to the ugly and ultimately destructive outcome for all stakeholders.

I am not attempting to propose legislative details, but I am strongly urging the Committee to take on board the underlying principles, which lead to successful forestry legislation. My propositions are not academic but based on existing examples in other countries.

And I urge all involved to use this period of forestry problems to prepare such legislation with care but determination and at a pace to have it in place as soon as possible in order to allow a diverse, modern and vibrant, quality based forest and timber industry to gain traction and fill the vacuum created by FT and Gunns in particular.

While fundamental changes may elicit groaning, teeth gnashing and begging bowl presenting, they are inevitable and if they don't happen in an organised way, haphazard spurts of disjointed legislation fragments will create just as much dissatisfaction and no durable results.

Triple bottom line – ecology, economy, society

The starting point for any forestry legislation is the recognition that forests (and there should not be a distinction between privately and publicly owned forests) are an invaluable natural asset, which requires the highest possible degree of care for it to fulfil the many roles it can and must play in the life of humans and the planet as a whole.

Translated into legislation this boils down to a triple bottom line approach. Forests must respond to ecological, economic and social needs in equal measure. In practical terms this means (in random order):

- Ecology: (production) forests have to retain (or be managed to increase) biodiversity and be sustainable. Natural processes such as water retention, erosion prevention, impact on regional climate, habitat for flora and fauna will be respected or enhanced.
- Economic activities such as wood harvest shall be organised in a sustainable way within the framework of the law and thus respecting the other two principles of the triple bottom line at all times.
- Society: The forest plays a major role in (among others) recreation or as pleasant landscape feature, thereby addressing the social component of the triple bottom line.

Sound silvicultural management methods

Clearfelling, monocultures, the use of chemicals and fertilisers are not deemed acceptable forest management methods. Production forests are managed according to “close to nature” principles, the aim being selectively harvested high quality saw logs in biodiverse forests of differing age and a mix of trees species. Pulp and (pellet) energy from wood is only considered as acceptable if the processes are fed by genuine waste (of which there is a significant proportion) and by using advanced technologies including pyrolysis for the production of biochar.

These are just some cornerstones of reasonable forest management. A host of finely tuned regulations ensures that all three objectives will be achieved.

Based on a forestry law of this nature, a durable, quality oriented forest industry can develop and operate in an environment of extraordinary stability and sustainability, given that well managed forests provide an unparalleled resource security on which a long term timber industry can be built.

Forest conservation

Against a background of a new forest law along the guidelines describe above the demand for the preservation of truly high conservation sections of forest can be easily integrated. There are good reasons for preserving biodiversity in forest environments. Beyond the sheer need to retain as much life on this ravaged planet as possible there are also clear direct benefits for humans in that wet native forests (for instance) play a major role in water availability and quality as well as local and regional climates.

Public funding

A triple bottom line forest framework makes it much easier to direct public funding to sectors where public assistance is warranted to fulfil the overall goals.

I repeat that my submission outlines the PRINCIPLES of a balanced forestry policy as they have been successfully applied in a number of countries around the world, where there are thriving forest and timber industries operating alongside carefully balanced ecosystems and supported by a thankful and proud population.

“Close to nature” and similar biodiversity, triple bottom line forest management systems are being increasingly taken up by countries, states and regions around the world.

It is hight time that Tasmania, and indeed Australia, take a new look at forest laws that aim at furthering the public well being in all its aspects and promise long lasting success for all.

Peter Brenner
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