

5-3-2011

The Chairman – The Hon. Dick Adams MP
Standing Committee on Agriculture, Resources, Fisheries and Forestry.

I write in relation to your most recent inquiry into the Forestry Industry – “Growing Australian Forestry”, which has a closing date of March 25 2011.

I write as a seventh generation farmer, who, as early as 1960 made fairly substantial investments in Native Forestry on the Southern edge of Tasmania’s Central Highlands, and have since diversified out into plantation soft and hardwood as part of a “whole farm” strategy.

Our family company is a member of Australian Forest Growers and Tasmanian Oak Growers. The views expressed in this submission are my own. I have no reservations about confidentiality.

My submission addresses a couple of your committee’s terms of reference, namely,

- Impact of plantations upon land, especially land use competition between forestry and agriculture.

Historical - during the development of the Forest Code of Practice there was a negotiated trade off of forested areas to be reserved across species and species mix, including overlays of geology and topography. The trade off was for industries right to commercially use the Native Forest resource across the non reserved forested areas, so long as operations were conducted within the Forest Code of Practice.

The level of reservation was to be an area across all species / species combinations, equivalent to that existing pre-European settlement. We achieved this and more. Since then, the conservation movement, over time has gained an increasing influence politically, to the detriment of the Forest Industry. Due to the Greens negative political influence on native forest commercial operations, in conjunction with PM John Howards introduction of the 20/20 vision and generous tax concessions to the plantation sector through Managed Investment Schemes (M.I.S.) and their subsequent demise, we are now seeing an industry in turmoil – hence your inquiry.

Environmental Principles - never underestimate the dynamics of nature – she is a wonderful restorer of a resource like Eucalypt Forest. Eucalypt forest regeneration survives on disturbance events and will continue to do so, reserved or otherwise. Locking up forest as reservation / wilderness does not save it or enhance it. Eucalypt forest will REGRESS, not progress, without disturbance.

“Wilderness”, as a concept has its origins from the nineteenth century romanticism. In its modern form, it is broadly defined as – an area of natural land, remote from mechanized

vehicles and from which there is little or no consciousness of the environmental disturbance of contemporary people. Wilderness is predominantly an URBAN CONCEPT.

It is for the most part, a PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSTRAINT, developed by those who, in reality, are the most alienated of all from the natural environment- THE CITY DWELLERS, whose dwelling, commercial and industrial infrastructure has a greater adverse impact in and on our environment than any Native Forest commercial operation might have.

To give you an example of the URBAN CONSTRAINT of the idea of wilderness! when you can buy “wilderness” beer and wine and dine in a “Wilderness Lodge”, then the wilderness concept becomes almost meaningless.

In “Wilderness”, there is no place for homosapiens. Man is regarded as a spoiler and his artifacts, even his memory are unwelcome.

Creation of wilderness areas runs the risk of being seen as no more than a form of institutionalised selfishness, and in this sense it seeks to create a DEMARICATION between the NATURAL WORLD and the cultural WORLD, that is, between the ENVIRONMENT and MAN.

Perceptions of wilderness can not and should not provide the foundation on which all management decisions are made.

All expertise should be harnessed. In this way, managers can work with tradition rather than against it. A good example might be the development of the Forest Code of Practice – all disciplines were consulted. What we need to be cognisant of is that it is not so much an issue of encouraging and developing traditional usage of our natural resource of wood fibre, BUT OF NOT REGULATING ITS USE OUT OF EXISTANCE.

The Currant Situation – because we are fast regulating wood fibre production from native forest out of existence, because of John Howards 20/20 vision, coupled with generous tax concessions for M.I.S. we are seeing plantation forestry marching across the traditional agricultural landscape at an alarming rate. In a lot of cases we are seeing plantations established on land that was historically described vegetatively, before European settlement, as SAVANNAH and open SAVANAH WOODLAND. That is no trees at all or very sparse tree vegetation. For example, all the Midlands of Tasmania, the Fingal and Derwent Valleys of Tasmania.

With an increasing world population, it needs to be fed. Growing trees on traditional agricultural land diminishes that potential and opportunity to be self-sufficient.

Land class should not be a consideration when determining land use. With soil science / technology as it is today, nutrient / mineral deficiencies can be remedied for successful food production. The only real limiting factor is water.

Look at what has been achieved on places like “Rushy Lagoon” in the N.E. of Tasmania and “Woolnorth” in the far N.W. of Tasmania.

Land for plantation establishment, if outside of current native forest areas, should be restricted to land with excessive slope. For example those areas cleared through the 1970's – 1980's with the advent of the woodchip industry.

Native Forest logging, mostly selective, should be allowed to continue. Some conversion to plantation within Native Forest for example on the degraded sites within the Native Forest should be permitted.

Human beings, in my opinion have a God given right to achieve an economic and social outcome by utilizing a natural and renewable resource. History has shown that if you give anything “a value”, people will look after that asset. In the case of Native Forest logging, the environmental outcome will be positive too. Hence, the “Tripple Bottom Line”.

An actively managed forest for all the multiple benefits we gain from it, is in my opinion, no different to an agricultural crop, grown, harvested and utilized on a yearly cycle. The only difference is of course that the “Forest Crop” has a longer rotation. Like an agricultural crop, the tree crop seed is dispersed, it germinates and grows to maturity. It is at this point that we should have the right to utilize the biomass for all manner of uses, including the preferred source of renewable energy, instead of relying on exhaustible non renewable fossil fuels.

The Future –

- 1 The Native Forest Resource must be made available for multiple use.
- 2 Further reservation should stop. Maintain reservation at the level determined through the “Salamanca” agreement. That is, that which existed pre European settlement.
- 3 Native Forest conversion to plantation should be permitted on degraded sites within.
- 4 Wholesale conversion of agricultural land to plantation by investment companies should be restricted to agricultural land with excessive slope.
- 5 Plantation rotations should be extended to value add and to be able to extract a greater range of higher value product.
- 6 To facilitate point five, strategies / practices need to be activated early in the life of the plantation. Silverculture is not an exact science- it is continually evolving. For future generations, we must try and get it right

John R. Shoobridge O.A.M.