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The Hon Dick Adams MP
Committee Chair

**House of Representatives Standing Committee
on Agriculture, Resources, Fisheries and Forestry**

arff.reps@aph.gov.au

Inquiry into the Australian forestry industry

I believe the major constraint to the Australian forest industry and to the social and economic benefit it can bring to regional Australia is the campaign of misinformation carried out against the Tasmanian forest sector in both the domestic and international market places by 'green' groups.

This campaign means that opportunities for future production, diversification, and value adding are limited. The campaign distorts the environmental impacts of forests and shows them out of context. Whilst this campaign continues the business environment will remain stagnant, with investors wary of risks of being targeted by secondary boycotts by environmental groups who are exempt under the Competition and Consumer Act 2010.

The protest campaign also diminishes the chances of potential renewable energy production from the forestry sector, such as Biofuels, Biomass, Biochar, and the opportunities for Carbon sequestration.

To highlight the outrageous impact of this campaign and to provide examples of the misinformation, I enclose an article that I authored and was published by Online opinion in 2006 for the committee's consideration.

Kind regards,

Alan Ashbarry

Conveniently ignoring the facts

17 March 2006

On May 13, 2005, deep in the heart of the Styx Valley, the Prime Minister John Howard and Premier Paul Lennon signed the historic [Tasmanian Community Forest Agreement](#). This agreement reserved one million hectares of old growth forest; permanently maintained the native forest estate at 95 per cent of the 1996 extent for public and private land; phased out 1080 in public forests; and reduced the clear felling of mature forest.

The agreement reserved environmental icons and outlined a transition for the timber industry to re-growth and plantation saw logs. As the agreement was based on the principles of sustainable development, balancing competing demands from the environment movement, the timber industry, and the community it was seen as a final compromise. It was not pleasing to all, but elements were applauded by all sides of the forest debate.

On March 6, 2006, the San Francisco based [Rainforest Action Network](#) (RAN) held [protests](#) at Australian embassies and consuls, to make a series of claims about Tasmanian forest practices; the government-owned forest manager, [Forestry Tasmania](#); and a Tasmanian integrated timber sawmilling and processing company, [Gunns Limited](#). This company is proposing an environmentally friendly elemental chlorine free pulp mill for Tasmania. RAN sought to give publicity to a report by the International Green movement and the views of a British MP on Tasmanian forests.

The Rainforest Action Network (RAN) likened Tasmania's forest practices to the rampant illegal logging in the third world, and claimed the last remaining old growth was being destroyed. This view of Tasmania, backed by many local activists, was projected onto the world stage and in letters to the Prime Minister. But what are the facts. Is Tasmania an international pariah, or is it in fact a saint?

The [Convention of Biological Diversity](#) is a good starting point for anyone who cares for our forests, plants and animals and our environment.

Its latest [target](#) is to conserve 10 per cent of forests world wide to protect biological diversity. Tasmania has met and passed this target and has reserved an outstanding 45 per cent of its total native forest, including over a million hectares of [old growth \(primary\) forest](#) (pdf file 267KB). Depending on which code of football you play, that's a million soccer fields or about 1.5 million rugby fields.

Outside these reserves forests not required for reservation are managed for timber harvesting using sustainable principles and under the guidelines of the [Forest Practices Code](#) (pdf file 911KB) that protects environmental and cultural values. The independent [Forest Practices Authority](#) chaired by an independent chair, with expertise in public administration, environmental and natural resource management, demands that all forestry must have a forest practice plan (FPP) that accounts for cultural and environmental values, including rare and endangered flora and fauna.

The Authority also publishes statistics from approved FPP's that show in 2004-2005 only 34,328 hectares of the total 3.2 million ha forest estate was planned for harvesting, of which only 12,600 ha was to be clear felled. Only about 10 per cent of this can [be classed as old growth](#).

Tasmania's forests are well managed and have been subject to official inquiries and reports for decades. Tall, old trees are "protected" in reservations and outside reserves by a [tall trees policy](#) that saves the biggest based on height and volume.

Tasmania is a microcosm of Australia in general. Australia's forest and wood products industries have an annual turnover of more than \$14 billion a year. The industry contributes about 7.5 per cent of Australia's manufacturing output. Forest industries are Australia's second largest manufacturing industry. It is built upon the principles of [sustainable forest management](#) based on scientific evidence.

Australia's forest management takes into account the unique character of our forest ecosystem and the particular requirements for sustainable management. It is based on Australia's international agreements and commitments, national and state legislative frameworks, national standards and principles, national and regional policy initiatives, and agreed codes of forest practices. Management also incorporates the broad community expectations for sustainable forest management, addressing environmental, economic, social, and cultural and heritage issues.

Employment in the industry has increased 45 per cent over the last 10 years. Government figures show the industry employs over 86,400 people, with 13,400 people directly employed in forestry and harvesting. The majority are employed in value adding, such as veneer, pulp and paper mills.

Yet the management of our forests has become a political football over the last three decades, with countless inquiries, **Regional Forest Agreements** and political campaigns. The 2004 Federal Election saw the then Labor Leader, Mark Latham, attempt to close down most of the Tasmanian native forest industry. The Liberal's John Howard managed to work out a compromise locking up a million hectares of old growth and high conservation value forest, but protecting jobs and the industry.

After that final agreement "saving" the best parts of the so-called "Tarkine" Wilderness and the Styx Valley, most of us would have thought the "battle to save Tassie's forest" was well and truly won.

These facts are ignored by the international protestors: they fail to even compare Tasmania's 45 per cent forest reservation with their own back yards. In the UK only 15 per cent is unavailable for timber production, hardly any of it old growth or in secure reserves. For the **European Union** the percentage is about 15 per cent overall but for some countries it is as low as 1-2 per cent. In Japan forest covers about 25 million hectares, of which about 10 million is plantation and only 250,000 ha (1 per cent) can be classed as old growth. The **United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre** estimates only about 18 per cent of North America's forests are within protected areas.

Is it more than coincidence that the RAN protest followed a recent visit by a United Kingdom MP to Tasmania, or the release of a report on legal logging by international green groups, or the **current review** by the United Kingdom's consultants of the Australian Forest Standard, all focusing on Tassie's forests?

The star witness for RAN, Norman Baker MP, (a member of the cross-bench Liberal Democrats - not a member of the UK Government nor a Deputy Minister as has been claimed) recently visited Tasmania and went to the Styx Valley, which has been subject to **industrial scale harvesting** since 1941 for news print, and was the birth place of clear fell, burn and sow silviculture for wet eucalypt forests.

The apparent pristine nature of this valley is testament to sound forest management practices. Baker described this valley as magnificent and demanded its reservation. His "Early Day" motion, which is part of the basis for the RAN protest, was never designed to be debated, and only received the support of 43 of the 646 members of the House of Commons in July last year.

The motion was in relation to the writ issued by Tasmanian timber company Gunns against anti-forest activists and groups. The **writ**, available on the web sites of the defendants, alleges assault by environmentalists against Gunns' employees, urine being thrown to contaminate timber, illegal obstruction and trespass, conspiracy and slander. It is currently before the Victorian Supreme Court. The Gunns' writ is not against free speech or legitimate well informed criticism.

The RAN also claimed to be supporting the so-called international green group's report on legal harvesting, written for their Tasmanian chapter by an employee of the local Wilderness Society and a Friends of the Earth spokesperson.

Not once did the report publish the amount of native forest or old growth reserved in Tasmania. It also ignored the fact Australia's domestic timber industry, relying on a resource from our well managed forest, harvested in full accord with the law, is competing with illegally harvested timber imported into Australia from countries like Malaysia and Indonesia.

The Commonwealth Government's expert consultants have recently estimated that **illegal logging** (pdf file 165KB) accounts for about \$400 million worth of forest products and wooden furniture imported into Australia: about 9 per cent of the total of these imports.

Wouldn't it be better, from a conservationist's perspective, if timber products were purchased from lawful, certified and sustainable forests managed on a renewal basis? Wouldn't it be better to promote Tasmania's outstanding achievement in reserving 45 per cent of its native forest to enhance biological diversity?

I wonder why people who claim to be conservationists refuse to acknowledge the amount of forest reserved in Tasmania. Why do they fail to promote the 1.9 million hectares of high quality wilderness? Or the fact that not one species of flora or fauna has gone extinct as a result of forestry in Tasmania? In fact, as the countless official inquiries and studies show, it is the forest industry that is conducting the **scientific research**, putting in the management plans and doing the hard work to ensure these species flourish.

Perhaps the recent protest is more about **political power** and a desire to close down an industry or an individual company, or influence an election, rather than promoting the lawful and sustainable harvesting of timber and Australia's commitment to the environment.