



Forest Industries Association of Tasmania

Submission to the Inquiry into Australia's National Parks, Conservation Reserves and Marine Protected Areas.

The Forest Industries Association of Tasmania (FIAT) is an industry association formed in 1983 to represent the interests of processors of Tasmanian forest products. Our members' activities are diverse and include the production of veneers, hardwood and softwood timber, pulp and paper, woodchip production and plantation and native forest management.

FIAT's 18 member businesses include all of the State's larger processors of forest products, including a significant proportion of the crown sawlog output, as well as all of the veneer produced in the State. FIAT Members' activities account for more than 75% of the gross value of production in the forest and wood products industry in Tasmania.

FIAT appreciates the opportunity to provide comment to the inquiry into Australia's National Parks, Conservation Reserves and Marine Protected Areas. FIAT's principal interest in this inquiry is predominantly concerned with reservation of forest areas and FIAT members have significant concerns over the significant escalation in the number and area of Parks and Reserves without a corresponding increase in management resources with the consequent potential for the non-realisation or loss of the original purpose behind the creation of those reserved areas.

Within this submission FIAT have addressed the Terms of Reference as published by the Committee which are of specific concern to our members.

Terms of Reference.

The funding and resources available to meet the objectives of Australia's national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas, with particular reference to:

a. the values and objectives of Australia's national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas;

The EPBC Act requires that each Commonwealth reserve be assigned to one of seven categories developed by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) for protected areas. The values and objectives of Australia's national parks are defined within Category II below:

CATEGORY II; National Park: Protected Area managed mainly for ecosystem conservation and recreation

Natural area of land and/or sea, designated to

(a) protect the ecological integrity of one or more ecosystems for this and future generations,

(b) exclude exploitation or occupation inimical to the purposes of designation of the area and

(c) provide a foundation for spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational and visitor opportunities, all of which must be environmentally and culturally compatible.

Objectives:

- to protect natural and scenic areas on national and international significance for spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational or tourist purposes;*
- to perpetuate, in as natural a state as possible, representative examples of physiographic regions, biotic communities, genetic resources, and species, to provide ecological stability and diversity;*
- to manage visitor use for inspirational, educational, cultural and recreational purposes at a level which will maintain the area in a natural state or near natural state;*
- to eliminate and thereafter prevent exploitation or occupation inimical to the purposes of designation;*
- to maintain respect for the ecological, geomorphologic, sacred and aesthetic attributes which warranted designation; and*
- to take into account the needs of indigenous people, including subsistence, in so far as these will not adversely affect the other objectives of management.*

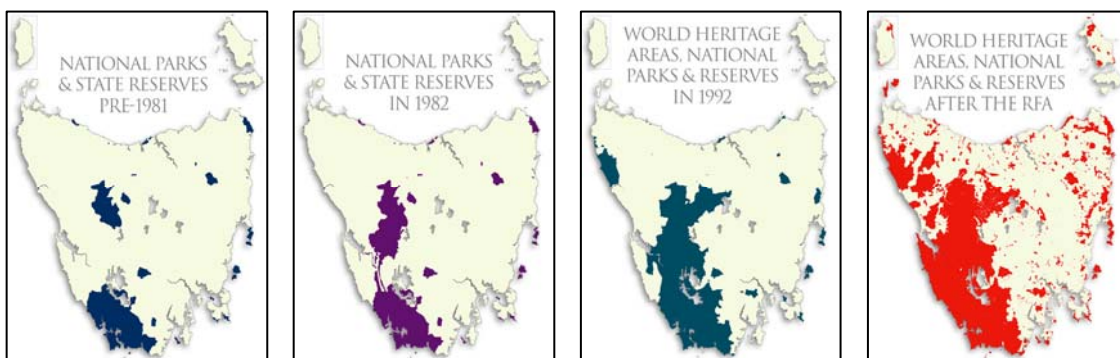
FIAT submits that there is a genuine question as to whether or not the ecological integrity of an ecosystem is protected by assigning that ecosystem national park status alone? This is what has happened within many of the areas declared as national parks in Tasmania, and many of these ecosystems are suffering as a direct result of that approach. There is considerable scientific evidence available indicating that the “reserve only” approach to biodiversity conservation has led to a decline in the health of many forest ecosystems within the National Park system.

A significant number of the forest ecosystems throughout Australia and specifically in Tasmania rely on a regular pattern of disturbance to facilitate their on-going health and regeneration process. The “lock up only” approach does not permit this disturbance process to be achieved and as a consequence many of the unique features that gave rise to the original national park listing will inevitably be lost.

A simple example is the old growth tall wet sclerophyll forest communities that have been added to the reserve system over the past 20 years that are incapable of regenerating in that format without disturbance to promote regeneration as the eucalypt species in these forests cannot regenerate. To achieve regeneration and continuity of the forest ecosystem that our legislators sought to preserve these forest types require extensive wild fire or other disturbance as the understorey is too thick to allow regeneration simply from natural seed fall. In the ordinary course of nature these forests will secede into a temperate rainforest with none of the eucalypt species present that were the focus of the original reservation.

b. whether governments are providing sufficient resources to meet those objectives and their management requirements;

Since the 1960’s in Tasmania substantial areas of land has been given some form of formal reserve status, whether it be National Park, World Heritage Area or other formal reserve. The maps below show a succession of reserve declarations between 1981 and 1997. An additional 148,000 hectares was given reserve status last year under the Tasmanian Community Forest Agreement bringing the reserved area of land in Tasmania to 42% or 2,861,400 hectares.



FIAT are concerned that this substantial increase in land reservation has not been matched by a commitment by Federal and/or State governments to funding appropriate resources to ensure the effective management of the reserved areas.

In broad terms the values and objectives for Australia's national parks can be summarised as being the protection of various ecological, physical, genetic and aesthetic values of particular designated areas for current and future generations by the exclusion of exploitation or occupation that would impact negatively on those values.

The absence of the provision of sufficient resources both fiscal and human to enable the provision of effective management regimes that are directed at the protection of the values that gave rise to the original listing will inevitably lead to the diminution and/or destruction of those original values thereby negating the purpose behind the listing.

As indicated in our introduction FIAT's primary interest in this inquiry is in the protection of forest communities through reservation and in this respect our comments will be directed at that facet of the reserve system.

FIAT believe that there has been wholly insufficient resources directed to the management of reserved forest areas including but not limited to fuel reduction activities including controlled burning. Extensive wildfires in Victoria, NSW and the ACT along with several smaller but equally damaging fires in Tasmania are testimony to the lack of attention to this vital management tool by governments.

This issue received considerable airing in the report produced from the House of Representatives Select Committee (2003) titled "A Nation Charred : Inquiry into the Recent Australian Bushfires" including recommendations that governments ensure adequate access to reserved areas and sufficient resources to effectively manage fuel loads as determined by the Bushfire Co-operative Research Centre. There is no evidence that is obvious to FIAT that any of these recommendations have been adopted and there has been little if any on ground change in policy or funding arrangements.

c. any threats to the objectives and management of our national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas;

FIAT considers the main threat to national parks is the absence of effective management. There are a number of factors contributing to this lack of management including a severe shortage of funding to be able to carry out effective management as well as in many cases a philosophical opposition to managing these areas. There is also community pressure in some cases that prevents effective management of these areas eg fuel reduction burning.

Threats through the lack of effective funding for reserve management are numerous and include weed infestation, feral animal infestation, increased fire intensity, decline in ecosystem health and succession of other species that replace the values that the ecosystem was originally put into the reserve system for.

Any Government, whether Federal or State, that intends to proclaim additional reserves must be compelled to put in place an adequate management regimes and ensure sufficient long term funding to manage such a reserve for all of its values including managing threatening processes. Any outcome short of this will ensure an exacerbation of the current unsatisfactory situation where reserves have been proclaimed and insufficient funding exists to manage our reserved ecosystems.

FIRE

FIAT is concerned that, as a result of 45% of Tasmania's forests being reserved, there is an increasing build-up of large fuel loadings in these areas. These fuel loadings have built up due to a reduction in land management practices in these areas – namely prescribed fuel reduction burning, and pose a massive threat to the biodiversity in Tasmania's forest resource along with adjoining multiple use forest should large scale, intense wildfire occur, as has recently occurred in Victoria, NSW and ACT..

The advantages of prescribed burning lie in reducing the intensity of bushfires and consequential damage to vegetation, life and property. Rates of spread of fire and fire intensity are both impacted upon by fuel loadings which are reduced through prescribed burning operations. Other conditions being equal, if the fine fuel on an area has been reduced by 50%, rates of spread should be 50% lower, while the fire intensity and the area burnt should be reduced by 75%. As heat intensity is 75% less, vegetation suffers far less damage (*Bushfires In Australia – RH Luke and AG McArthur*). It is important to note that hazard reduction does not prevent fires but it does keep them manageable and assists in lessening the prospect of landscape-wide wild fires such as were experienced in NSW, ACT and Victoria over recent years.

There is also an advantage in developing strategic access to create vegetation management units. This could be undertaken in a way that restricts general public access to protect other values but still allows emergency access.

Many of these points are raised on the report produced from the House of Representatives Select Committee (2003) titled "A Nation Charred : Inquiry into the Recent Australian Bushfires", however minimal action has been taken with respect to many of the recommendations provided in that report.

WEEDS AND FERAL ANIMALS

In many of Tasmania's reserved areas, a lack of funding and resources is leading to an increased infestation of weeds and feral pests throughout these areas. Weeds and feral pests have the ability to impact on biodiversity and ecosystem health within the reserve system.

Another threat within some of Tasmania's reserved areas is the significant increase in particular native animal populations. An example of this is quite evident on Maria Island where many of the older blue gums are going into decline and the younger regeneration is not evident due to the huge browsing pressure from native animals. In order for these areas to retain successful regeneration some sort of protection program will need to be implemented.

d. the responsibilities of governments with regard to the creation and management of national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas, with particular reference to long-term plans;

One of the key responsibilities of governments with regard to management of reserved areas within Australia is to apply accepted sustainable management regimes similar to the Australian Forestry Standard / Program for Endorsement of Forest Certification / Forest Stewardship Council which are all based on the Montreal criteria as well as committing long term resources, including funding, to the management of these areas.

It is unacceptable for governments to continually reserve areas of land within Australia and have no way to measure the health and management of these ecosystems to ensure their vitality for future generations. Currently the success of the reserve system in Australia is measured by the area within the reserve system with little or no regard for the health of these areas. A monitoring and reporting standard must be developed to ensure that by reserving ecosystems we are not committing them to death by benign neglect and that the original values sought to be protected are in fact protected.

A report titled "*how well are we doing? – some thoughts on the effectiveness of protected areas.*" in "In Parks" Vol 9 1999 IUCN by M Hockings and A Phillips observed ; -

"many protected area managers are not able to systematically review the results of their efforts. In the absence of such reviews, however, money and other resources can be wasted on programs that do not achieve their objectives. Protected area managers must expect to come under even greater pressure to introduce systems of monitoring and evaluation."

With respect to “long term” plans, it is important that Governments understand that the life cycle of many ecological communities that exist within the reserve system are hundreds of years and the management of these areas needs consider these time frames rather than working on managing these communities on a 5-10 year timeline.

e. the record of governments with regard to the creation and management of national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas.

Governments, both State and Federal, have created many reserves but have not allowed sufficient resources to effectively manage them for their intended purposes.

The intent and purpose of reserved areas will not be met through a process of lockups without active and effective ongoing management. Many areas may in fact be condemned to death through benign neglect.

It is also worth noting that one of the primary purposes behind the creation of reserved areas is to permit access to those reserved areas for the public, both current and future, however a significant proportion of reserved areas remain inaccessible to all but the fittest of the community. It is incumbent upon governments that create reserved areas to ensure that they are accessible to the community at large through adequate roading and other relevant infrastructure so as to permit enjoyment of those areas to the majority not a select minority.

ENGO groups have often argued for the preservation of forested areas to permit ecotourism opportunities to be developed but have vociferously opposed any roading or infrastructure development that would facilitate those activities. If the original objectives of Australia’s national parks are to manage visitor use it appears incongruous for governments not to be required to develop ecologically sensitive and appropriate infrastructure to permit access.

Another downside of the current lack of access and infrastructure is that those areas that can be accessed are being subjected to overuse which is causing considerable deterioration of the original values that underpinned the creation of the reserve in the first instance eg Overland Track through Cradle Mountain Lake St Clair National Park.

This lack of access facilities also manifests itself in an incapacity for emergency services personnel to gain access to remote reserved areas for fire fighting or rescue activities it also restricts the capacity of authorities to undertake effective management of the area.

FIAT once again thanks you for the opportunity to provide our views to the Committee on this important issue. Should you require any additional information or to discuss this submission in greater detail please contact the undersigned on (03) 6224 1033.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Terry Edwards', written in a cursive style.

Terry Edwards
Chief Executive