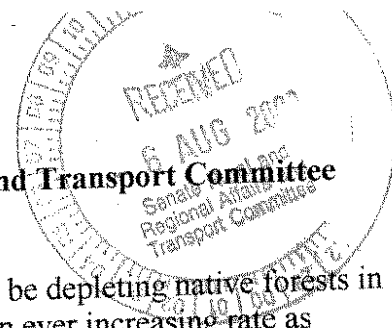


**Submission to the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee  
2020 Vision – Plantations in Tasmania**



The '2020 Vision' for plantation establishment appears to be depleting native forests in southern Tasmania because they are being clearfelled at an ever increasing rate as plantations are established in their place. Clearly this is affecting river catchments and may also change rainfall patterns over Tasmania. At this stage there has been little or no research on these effects and, as the potential long term consequences are now becoming realised, it is essential to carry out this research.

**Environmental Impacts**

In view of current concerns about global climate change, the effects of large scale land clearing must be considered as an important factor, and contained as soon as possible. It may be more sustainable to convert marginal agricultural land to plantations, despite the slower growth of trees on such land, than to destroy native forests, which are functioning eco-systems, for that purpose. If the environmental benefits were factored in, these might offset the slower rate of return on investment.

**Performance of Plantations**

The scientific basis for the '2020 Vision' must be re-examined to take into account the effects of plantation establishment in Tasmania. Perhaps one way to achieve this is through a detailed examination of the current status of 'Tassie Trees Trust 2000' plantations. These are an example of a tax-deductible scheme by which individuals invested in Forestry Tasmania plantation projects. Investors were to receive their returns when plantations are thinned after 10 – 12 years, but it may be difficult to assess the prospects for such investments, as plantations often appear to grow more slowly than predicted. Perhaps 'Trees Trust 2000' may provide a microcosm of the plantation industry?

**Transparency**

One of the most disturbing aspects of the forestry industry is the difficulty of getting information about its activities. Forestry Tasmania manages more than 1.6 million hectares of State Forest, and large areas are clearfelled each year, but little information is available to the public. The log truck traffic out of the Huon valley is a constant source of distress to many residents, as well as to visitors, but it is very difficult to find out where the timber is coming from.

**Private Timber Reserves**

Another major issue for residents and ratepayers is the system of Private Timber Reserves, which are outside the Planning Schemes. This means that landowners can apply for Private Timber Reserves, and these can be approved by authority delegated to the General Manager of the Council. There is almost no right of appeal by members of the public. Thus, the rules that apply to most landowners, and to other industries, do not apply to those who classify their land as a Private Timber Reserve.

### **Control of Industry and Democratic Process**

The Tasmania Together consultation process showed that the majority of Tasmanians wanted to see an end to clearfelling of high conservation forests, and a benchmark was set for January 2003. The Tasmanian Government chose to ignore this deadline and clearfelling continues. At both State and Local Government level the forest industries appear to have a great deal of power. This may be exacerbated by the current review of the Local Government Act, which is likely to further decrease the effectiveness of elected members, and give more power to the General Managers of Tasmanian Councils (see attached, Mercury, 29<sup>th</sup> July, 2003).

### **Waste of Resource**

Another issue is the waste of timber in the 'clearfell and burn' regime adopted by Forestry Tasmania in the Southern Forests for establishment of plantations or regrowth eucalypt forest. This has been documented for the coupe Esperance 74D by Graham Green, Timber Workers for Forests, in 2002. The waste of timber demonstrated in that study indicates that Forestry Tasmania does not wish to obtain maximum value from the forest, but wants to send as much as possible to the market, in the form of woodchip logs, as quickly as possible, before growing plantation or eucalypt regrowth with minimal biodiversity in its place. Consequently, there is loss of potential employment in the timber industry, as documented by Graham Green in Tasmanian Timber Industry Jobs, 2002 (attached).

### **Rates and Road Taxes**

As an elected member of the Huon Valley Council, I am aware that many residents of the valley are deeply disturbed by the rapid destruction of the Southern Forests, mostly by Forestry Tasmania, with very little return to the valley in the form of employment. There are also issues relating to the fact that Forestry Tasmania does not pay rates for the land that it manages, nor does it pay for the damage caused by log trucks and other heavy vehicles to local roads. In addition, roads are constructed primarily for the forestry industry at the taxpayers' expense (eg allocation of \$1 million to the Lonnaveale Road in this financial year), and not necessarily with the support of those taxpayers.

### **Value Adding in Tasmania**

Tasmania has great potential to increase employment through productive use of special species timbers. However, as native forests comprising many valuable species of trees are clearfelled and replaced by either plantations or regrowth eucalypts, to be harvested on relatively short rotations, the so-called minor species will become increasingly scarce and the opportunity for high value-adding through use of these unique timbers will be lost. (see attached, 'Wooden Boatbuilding in 2020' by John Young)

### **Honey Production and Pollination Services**

In the Southern Forests there is deep concern among beekeepers as the leatherwood resource on which they rely to produce the unique leatherwood honey is rapidly dwindling. Soon there will not be enough to sustain the industry. This has flow-on effects to all orchard and horticultural activities in the valley as they rely on the beekeepers to

provide pollination services. As the forest is clearfelled and burned so that the vast areas proposed for plantation establishment under the '2020 Vision' can be achieved, other industries will suffer and eventually even disappear. In southern Tasmania, diversity of development is the key to future success.

### **Tourism**

Another industry under threat from the replacement of native forests by plantations is the tourism industry, which, in southern Tasmania, relies on the beauty of the countryside and forests. The sight of clearfelled areas is distressing to visitors as well as residents, and I know of people who have loved visiting Tasmania, but have said they will not return as it is too painful to see the way the magnificent forests are treated.

### **Biodiversity**

In the Southern Forests of Tasmania, there are major problems with the large-scale conversion of natural native forests, with their high levels of plant and animal biodiversity (including ferns, mosses, liverworts, fungi, lichens and soil micro-organisms) to monocultures of eucalypts with little or no biodiversity in the understorey.

In the light of the above comments, I believe there should be serious consideration of the '2020 Vision' if it is to be applied by destruction of native forests to provide land for plantation establishment.

Dr Elizabeth Smith

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# Concern over shift of power in councils

By CHARLES WATERHOUSE

GENERAL managers of Tasmanian councils are set to gain greater powers at the expense of elected members, says a southern mayor.

Southern Midlands Mayor Colin Howlett says he is certain a review of the Local Government Act now under way will see an even greater swing to power of council general managers than occurred with the passage of the 1993 Local Government Act.

He said this shift went against what the people who



**WARNING:** Colin Howlett says general managers will have greater power.

voted people on to councils wanted.

"At the very minimum I don't think they should regulate or legislate the rights of councillors away," Cr Howlett said.

He said before the 1993 Act

mayors and wardens were the chief executive officers of councils and basically were in control of council clerks, now known as general managers.

Cr Howlett is one of Tasmania's longest serving councillors — a councillor for 32 years and Southern Midlands mayor since 1994.

He emphasised his comments were not aimed at Southern Midland Council general manager Tim Kirkwood who he described as one of the best council general managers.

Cr Howlett said most elected members would privately agree

with his comments, particularly in the non-urban councils.

He said council staff were not accountable to ratepayers, whereas councillors were elected to represent the interests of the community.

"This review will take influence and power away from the elected members," he said.

"The public don't know the implications of what is happening now.

"The vast majority of people who pay the rates still believe the elected members are there to run their corporation."