

SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON RURAL AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS AND TRANSPORT

AUSTRALIAN PLANTATION FORESTRY

EXPLOITATION AND DESTRUCTION OF OLD GROWTH AND RAINFOREST RESOURCES IN TASMANIAN PLANTATION AREAS

Old growth and natural rainforest resources in Tasmania are currently suffering from dangerous over-exploitation due to the introduction of the pine and eucalyptus plantation industry. Over many generations these resources have been used by local timber workers in furniture making, in home building, and in the production of the beautiful woodcraft for which Tasmania is renowned. However, current native forest harvesting practices may soon lead to a situation where this resource will no longer be available for these purposes.

To the extent that the 'Plantations for Australia: The 2002 Vision' document endorses these practices, it needs to be balanced by a recognition of the serious danger they pose to the continued preservation of our old growth and rainforest resources for the enjoyment of, and use by, all Australians.

The Threat from Clear Felling of Tasmania's Forest Resources

Tasmania's unique rainforest timbers are very slow-growing. Some, like the famous Huon Pine, take hundreds of years to reach maturity. These special species are mainly understory trees which need a tree canopy for protection as they develop. The canopy allows them to grow upwards to the natural light, resulting in straight long trunks. This characteristic makes these timbers especially well-suited to the needs of local, small-scale timber users who can make maximum use of the modest amounts of timber they use from the forests.

However, the clear felling method currently employed by Tasmanian Forest Industries is widely recognised as a highly indiscriminate and wasteful method of timber harvesting. Using this method a whole area of forest is totally flattened and all suitable sawlogs are removed along with woodchip and pulp timber. Nothing is left standing. Any forest residue which remains is burnt as the most cost-effective means of preparing a seedbed for aerial sowing of eucalyptus or for related plantation applications.

The Depletion of Commercially Accessible Old Growth and Rainforest Resources

The value of this clear felling approach to timber harvesting in Tasmania is highly questionable on both economic and environmental grounds for the following reasons:

- Because of the indiscriminate nature of the harvesting process and the 'blanket' burning of harvest residue there is enormous wastage of natural timber resources which could be used for other commercial purposes; and
- There is very little regeneration of natural rainforest species as the types of tree varieties regenerated through this process are fast growing eucalyptus and radiata pine required by the plantation industry. As a consequence, the rich diversity of forest species currently growing in the timber harvesting areas of Tasmania is rapidly being replaced by a mono-culture of plantation pine and eucalyptus trees.

If this method of harvesting is allowed to continue in its current form, the availability of special species like the Tasmanian Swamp Gum, Stringy Barks, Myrtle, Celery-Top Pine, Black Heart Sassafras, Leatherwood, Blackwood, Wattles and the King Billy and Huon Pine will be seriously jeopardised. So, also, will be the local saw-milling, woodwork and craft industries which rely upon access to this resource for their livelihood.

Strategies for Preserving Old Growth and Rainforest Resources in Pine Plantation Areas

At present neither the Plantation Industry nor the Federal Government appear to acknowledge the serious problems facing the regeneration of old growth and natural rainforest resources. However, the evidence clearly indicates that the preservation of these natural resources can only be ensured by the phasing out of the current indiscriminate logging practices used by the plantation industry in old growth and rainforests and the introduction of more sustainable forestry management practices.

Changes of the type alluded to in the Senate Inquiry's terms of reference, such as the creation of longer rotation plantations (*Inquiry Reference 12 (d)*), will do little to address the serious obstacles to regeneration of old growth and natural species posed by the proliferation of timber plantations. The only effective way for the Government to respond to this problem is to:

- Require the pine plantation industry to adopt selective logging practices in forest areas designated for commercial use which avoid the excesses of the current clear-felling methods; and
- Provide Government funding for forestry programs specifically targeted at preserving old growth forests and regenerating natural rainforest species.

Only in this way will our old growth and natural rainforest resources be preserved for future use and enjoyment by all Australians.

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