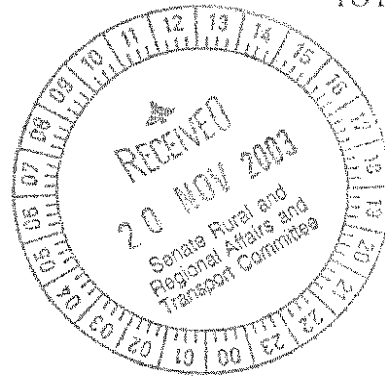




Snowy River Interstate Landcare Committee

Bombala RLPB 106 Maybe St
PO Box 121, Bombala NSW 2632
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17 November 2003

Senator Heffernan
Parliament House
CANBERRA, 2600.

Dear Senator,

An invitation is extended to you to visit the Bombala and East Gippsland border region in order to investigate the effects if the rapid expansion of Private Plantation Forestry in the area. The concerns of the residents in relation to this expansion include effects on valuable ground water resources and a lack of planning that has direct social impacts and dramatically alters the land use of the whole area.

Private Plantation Forestry appears to receive more favourable tax treatment than alternative land use in the region. In particular investors are able to claim 100% tax deductibility in the first year for up front payment for woodlot management services to be delivered up to 25 years in the future (eg. A T O Ruling P R 2002/145). In the case of the Willmott Forests Professional Investor 2003 Project, an initial investment of \$7,700 covering the lease and management of a one hectare woodlot from planting to harvest is deductible in the first year. Alternative land uses in the region do not attract such beneficial treatment (analogous to up front deductibility of 25 years worth of pasture improvement and maintenance for a grazier), with the result that private investment in the region is heavily skewed toward plantation forestry. The attractiveness of softwood forestry as an investment is therefore not strongly influenced by the value and marketability of the final product.

While traditional industries are in a state of depression, the resulting demand for woodlots encourages landowners to take the opportunity for an immediate return by selling agricultural land to plantation operators. Apart from environmental problems associated with establishing pine forestry monoculture over large areas, there is also the risk that distortions in the tax system are also diverting land to less productive uses, with the economic losses compounded over the 30 years or longer taken for *Pinus radiata* plantations to mature.

On the other hand the NSW State Forest, until the closing of the hard wood forests of the South East of NSW, has had a record of good management and planning, with the long-term aim of producing a product to meet the demands of the building industry and other users. This was managed without encroaching on the lower rainfall areas that are now being targeted by private plantation interests.

Other issues for consideration, which arise from the establishment of plantation forestry, are the inevitable creation of habitat, which provides for the uncontrollable explosion of wildlife in particular feral animals, which in the short term severely reduces the landuse of adjoining land. In



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November 17, 2003

Dear Mr Bracks,

Re: Pine plantations

The Snowy River Interstate Landcare Committee (SRILC) is an umbrella organisation for 10 landcare groups that operate out of both Victoria and NSW. The area covered by SRILC ranges from Ando in the North through to Bonang in the south. The main town centres are Bombala and Delegate in south-eastern NSW.

As a group we feel there must be a balance between productivity and environmental issues. We do not believe that Pine plantations in the area contribute to this balance. For a program to be sustainable it should be able to operate with little economic, environmental or social disruption. We believe this is not the case with a program that sees vast tracts of arable land put under pine plantations.

- PEOPLE

Part of the values for our landcare network includes respect and recognition of individuals and community wellbeing. We therefore feel it necessary to comment on the issues facing our communities in relation to pine plantations.

The turning over of farming lands to plantations has a huge negative impact on the stability of populations in isolated communities. The loss of one family reduces numbers in local groups such as the Rural Fire Service (RFS) and the Country Fire Association (CFA) and so reduces the community capacity to protect itself. Schools and services such as banks, police and health all become jeopardised. There then becomes a loss in social interaction, input of new ideas and community connection.

Decline in population also leads to further losses in infrastructure such as roads and service centres. All this, plus loss of visual amenity will inevitably lead to a loss of tourism potential. Areas could eventually become so isolated that people will no longer find a reason to visit there let alone live there.

- WATER

Research undertaken recently by Dr Robert Vertessey, a senior CSIRO scientist, shows detrimental effects on the hydrology of our rivers and streams. Plantations can severely reduce water runoff and therefore environmental flows. In a report on the impact of logging practices released by DNRE they quote that Bosch and Hewlett (1982) deduced that conifers decrease water yield at a greater rate than hardwood or scrub.

Over recent years there have been vast amounts of money spent by the Governments of both NSW and Victoria, as well as the Federal Government, on the improvement of the hydrology of the Snowy River catchment. It is beyond our understanding how the government can forgo a lot of this valuable work by allowing the land to be placed under monocultural plantations that severely affect water movement.

In the Victorian governments Green Paper it is stated that if 50,000 hectares were planted under pines inflows to a river system could be cut by up to 7%. This means that an area the size of the combined Bombala/Delegate plantations (about 60000 hectares) can reduce flows by 7%, which is more than the 6% recently re-released into the Snowy.

There have also been many questions raised about the effects of plantations on water quality. Application of fertilisers and use of agricultural chemicals in plantation establishment and other operations can contribute chemicals to rural water bodies. Additional potential sources of chemical contamination are hydrocarbon products from machinery used for forestry operations. Reports have reached us of rivers where there are more than acceptable amounts of Simazine in-stream. This will seriously impact on the food chain and is extremely detrimental to the ecological system and biodiversity as a whole.

- ECONOMICS- Timber vs Water

Scientists increasingly argue that the economic value of timber is much less than the value of the water that is lost due to plantations. According to Senator Bill Heffernan in a recent report in the Financial Review, trees consume about 2-3 megalitres more than pasture, or about \$1500 worth of water.

The impact of commercial pine plantations on both the environment and existing water users does not seem to have been taken into account. This has particular relevance in a time of severe drought and climate change.

- FIRE RISK

At present pine plantations form a random pattern amongst farmland in the Bombala, Delegate region. Where these plantations back on to bushland they increase the fuel load and when they are dotted amongst farms it leaves a greater proportion of properties exposed to higher fire risks than when surrounded by previously cleared areas.

We are concerned about the apparent lack of a fire plan for this patchwork of plantations and have no assurance that there is a plan for the 'whole' plantation. There is also the issue that plantations can restrict access to water supplies.

- MONTREAL PROCESS

Australia is a signatory to the Montreal Process, which works toward identifying a process for implementation of sustainable forest management. Within the context of the Montreal Process, sustainable forestry may be defined as "the supply of wood products at a regular rate that can be maintained indefinitely for present and future generations while at the same time maintaining non-wood values at or above target levels considered necessary by society for the prevention of environmental harm and the provision of environmental services for the common good."

So, sustainable private forestry would therefore be considered as a 'wise system' that regulates wood supply at a rate that provides ongoing benefit to landholders and communities without harming the environment or the present social structure. SRILC does not see that this is the case in this area. As already stated the local pine plantations cause a decline in population and adverse environmental effects. We feel the Government needs to take a very close look at what it means to be a part of the Montreal Process.

November 17, 2003

• Sincerely,

Robert Belcher



Chairman
Snowy River Interstate Landcare Committee
'Warruga'
Bonang, 3888

Peter Williams



Treasurer
Snowy River Interstate Landcare
PO Box 110
Bombala, 2632

the long term the plantations also provide a source of supply of noxious weeds(ie, Blackberry, Serrated Tussock, Thistles etc) which, although controlled on the perimeter, become dormant under the closed canopy, only to explode after clear felling.

Please find appended a draft letter that is to be forwarded to the Premiers of both NSW and Victoria and the Federal Minister for the Environment, which further highlight these and other concerns.

The well-documented evidence of the disastrous effects of plantations on the fragile water resources of a country in drought, and the negative impacts on the social development of local populations is a matter of great concern. We feel it requires a stay in the further development of the private plantation industry until an in-depth study of the aims and effects has been carried out.

The views expressed here represent the various concerns of the residents of the area, who, whilst appreciating the economic benefits of well planned Plantation Timber production, desire that an inquiry be undertaken to ensure the viability of all Primary Industries concerned. We request that this invitation be given your earliest consideration.

Sincerely,



Peter Williams
Treasurer
Snowy River Interstate Landcare Committee.
Board Member
Rural Lands Protection Board, Bombala.
PO Box 110
Bombala NSW 2632



Robert Belcher
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