

## **Submission to the Senate Inquiry into Water Policy Initiatives**

I am an elected member of the Huon Valley Council, the southernmost municipality in Australia. My submission deals largely with local issues but is relevant to Water Policy Initiatives in that it is concerned with the impacts of land use change on the availability of water for agriculture in the lower parts of catchments, and also for town water supplies and environmental flows. The protection of rivers is important in the Huon Valley and throughout Tasmania.

The potential effects of climate change cannot be easily predicted, but base line values for water flows are needed before decisions are made about changes in land use and the construction of major infrastructure for water supplies to communities.

I understand that the National Water Initiative was signed by Tasmania in May 2005 and was put in place to ensure that water is available to all users – agriculture, town water supplies and environmental flows.

In September 2005 a land-owner near Geeveston contacted me about Forestry Tasmania's plans to clearfell more land in one of the two catchments supplying the township of Geeveston. Forestry Tasmania was proposing to clearfell coupe FN 026B, and the area appears to include most of the catchment for the lowest tributary of Scotts Rivulet, an area of about 40ha, about 400m above the small weir from which Geeveston's water supply is piped into a water treatment system. Under the Forest Practices Code it seems that there should not be forestry operations within 2 km of a water intake – and this would seem to be particularly important when it is the intake for a town, not just a few houses. Also, Forestry Tasmania and Council are required to provide information on water allocations in catchments, but there is no reference to this in Forest Practices Plans for the operation. Also, the Good Neighbour Charter which Forestry Tasmania, as a commercial tree farmer signed up to in July 2000, commits to regular consultation with local government on such issues as roading and water intakes.

In the case of this particular forestry operation my main concerns are:

### **Siltation**

- the effects of increased sediment in the rivulet and siltation of the weir during and soon after harvesting. The weir is quite small and if it gets filled with silt from runoff after harvesting then water storage will be further decreased, and in summer this could be very serious.

### **Regeneration burns**

- regeneration burns and their effects on water and air quality in Geeveston, since regeneration burns within a few hundred metres of the weir could contaminate Geeveston's water supply with ash and soluble chemicals that are toxic.

### **Herbicides**

- the use of chemicals for weed control in plantation establishment, and the potential for runoff to enter the Geeveston town water supply. The crop protection measures to be used by Forestry Tasmania are not specified in the Forest Practices Plan for FN026B, but it is important that chemicals are not sprayed in a water catchment. It has been reported that chemicals have been found in water 10km from where they were applied. Clearly these toxic chemicals can get into the groundwater and contaminate it for a long time. It is difficult and expensive to monitor water for these chemicals, so the people drinking the water can't know whether their drinking water is contaminated.

### **Water loss**

- Another big issue is the loss of water due to the groundwater being absorbed by the growing trees over the next 20-40 years. Coupe FN 026B is the first in the lower part of the Scotts Rivulet catchment, but from the Forestry Tasmania map it appears that the whole of the catchment is scheduled for harvesting. The Forest Practices Code allows for logging of up to 5% of a

catchment each year. In a statement to the Senate Inquiry into Forestry in 2004, the General Manager of Forestry Tasmania, Hans Drielsma, said that “there are no catchments in Tasmania where forest plantations exceed 20% of the total catchment area, which is considered to be the level at which plantations any have a discernible effect on water yield.”

Forestry Tasmania made a presentation to Council in December 2005 and stated that 17.5% of the Scotts Rivulet catchment had already been converted to plantation (3.5% each year for the past 5 years) and that FN026B was 3% of the total area, bringing the area to 20.5%. This conversion should go on for a few more years and then decrease to 1-2% per year after that. Clearly, over the next ten years the level of conversion to plantation will have far exceeded that which Hans Drielsma stated as the level at which plantations have a discernible effect on water yield, ie 20%.

### **Catchment Management**

It seems that what is needed is a long term planning assessment and audit for both the Scotts Rivulet and Kermantidie River catchments, which supply Geeveston, and this may also apply for the Esperance River catchment, which supplies the township of Dover. There are no large lakes or reservoirs in these catchments, so the rivers need to have good continuous flow throughout the year to supply Geeveston and Dover with water.

I understand that under the National Water Initiative the forest industry now has to state an allocation estimate – to indicate how much water is going to be taken out of the catchment by growing trees and Council also has responsibilities under the agreement. It is extremely important that both the quality and quantity of all our water supplies is protected. The populations of Geeveston and Dover are likely to grow, especially in view of the “Sea-change” phenomenon, and there will be more demand for clean water, partly because people coming from other places are likely to use more water, and they expect good quality water. Water quality in these areas is already quite poor compared with other parts of the valley.

In their presentation to Council in December 2005 Forestry Tasmania acknowledged that they have no records of the water flows in Huon Valley catchments. I understand that the Huon Valley Council has applied for funding from the Australian Government for a water scheme to supply water from the Huon River to the whole of the valley, excluding Dover and perhaps Cygnet, which has a reservoir and protected catchment. However, it is not clear that water flows in the Huon River will be sufficient in dry summers to supply sufficient water. Water flows have not been published, and plantation and regrowth forest establishment in the Huon, Weld and Picton catchments may reduce flows in the Huon River over the coming decades. The effects of climate change on water flows in these river systems should also be assessed.

I believe that a general report and audit on all catchments throughout the Huon Valley municipality is needed, and that the potential impacts of forestry on water supplies must be assessed – especially if further large areas are to be converted to plantations or regrowth forests.

I hope that this submission is relevant to the inquiry, and that the committee can accept it. I would be interested in providing evidence at a public hearing in Tasmania.

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