There is a Way Through

Brief on Forests, Jobs and the Wood Products Industry in Tasmania

THE GREENS

1. The distinction between native forests and plantations

Native forests occur naturally and support a rich mixture of plants and animals. Old growth forests contain trees and other plants over 100 or 120 years old (when they start to form the hollows necessary for possums and owls). They can be several hundred or even over 1000 years old.

Plantations are tree crops planted to produce wood. Like other crops, they are usually of one species, uniform age and harvested at around 15 years (for chips and fibre) or 30+ years for sawlogs.

2. There is no shortage of wood

90% of the 5 million tonnes of wood from Tasmania's native forests ends up as woodchips, exported to Asia, mainly Japan. The quantities used for sawlogs are small and for veneer tiny.

Large areas of Tasmania's and Australia's eucalypt plantations will mature by 2005. The wood volumes coming on stream will generate a glut of hardwood chips if native forests remain in the supply equation and even more so if native forest logging continues to be subsidised by the Tasmanian government. (See J. Clark, N. Edwards, Senate Plantation Inquiry submissions)

Softwood plantations are already supplying the bulk of Australia's sawntimber, and the supply from the maturing plantations created in the 1960s and 1970s is increasing rapidly.

3. Tasmanian jobs in the wood products industry are disappearing

There are five to ten times as many jobs per tonne of wood in manufacturing (into panels, sawntimber, plywood, paper etc) as in woodchips and whole log exports.

Since the RFA was signed (1997), Tasmania's woodchip exports have doubled to 5 million tonnes. The small increase in forestry and logging jobs (+250) is hugely outweighed by the 1000 jobs lost in manufacturing. For example: 280 jobs lost when the Burnie pulpmill closed; 90 jobs shed by North Forest Products before Gunns took over; a further 30 shed by Gunns in 2001. These losses result from industry restructuring, not from conservation. (See Green, 2002)

By contrast, tourism jobs are growing rapidly.

4. Once solved, it stays solved

The forests issue has been dealt with in Queensland, WA, western Victoria and northern NSW. Tasmania is now the epicentre but the issue can be solved as in other regions.

The conflict arises from the misplaced focus on wood supply when the jobs are in wood processing.

The solution is to focus on Tasmania's existing plantation resource (approx 200 000 ha) and develop a manufacturing industry policy aimed at processing as much of it as is commercially viable in Tasmania and Australia.

Tasmanian Greens Forest Ask for the Federal Election 2004

1. Protection in Secure Reserves

Immediately protect from logging all of Tasmania's old growth and high-conservation value forests, wilderness areas and other areas of great natural significance.

The following 240,000 hectares are proposed:

1 Extensions to Tarkine reserves (as per 1992 proposed World Heritage nomination boundaries);

2 Extensions to reserves in Leven / Black Bluff area;

3 Other smaller areas at Reedy Marsh, Bruny Island, Gog Range and as on the map;

4 Great Western Tiers National Park;

5 NE Highlands reserve extensions (includes Blue Tier, Mt Victoria, Dans Rivulet, Avenue River and Mt Maurice areas);

6 Extensions to Ben Lomond National Park;

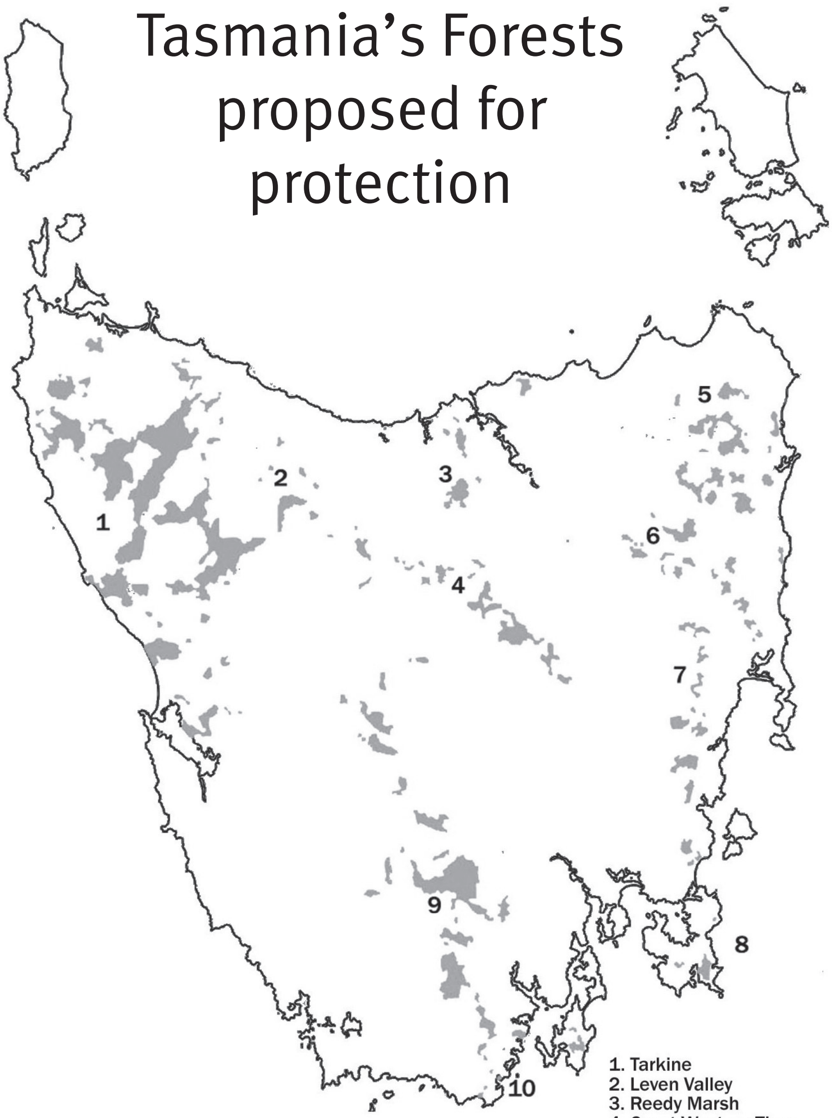
7 Eastern Tiers reserves as proposed by Tasmanian Conservation Trust in 1996 (and including the forest at South Sister);

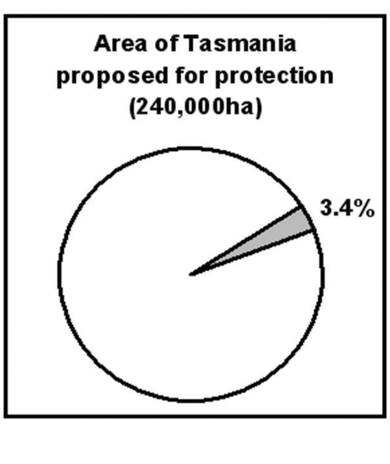
8 Extensions to the Tasman National Park;

9 Styx Valley of the Giants National Park;

9a Eastern extensions to the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area as identified by Parks, Wildlife and Heritage in 1990 (Navarre, Counsel/Derwent, Blue Ck, U. Florentine, Wedge, Broad, U. Tyenna, Styx, Snowy Range slopes, Weld, middle Huon, Picton, U. Esperance, Catamaran);

10 North-East Peninsula of Recherche Bay





2. Areas outside reserves

Forests outside the reserves identified above should not become 'sacrifice zones', through the transfer of woodchipping pressure and an even higher rate of logging than is current.
We propose:

- ending industrial scale logging of old growth and mixed age forests;
- ending conversion of native vegetation to plantations;
- logging be reduced to take account of the withdrawal of resources from protected areas and changed management;
- banning use of 1080 poison on native wildlife;
- reviewing forestry fire regeneration and management practices;
- ruling out the burning of Tasmania's native forests for electrical power;
- encouraging plantation management to Forest Stewardship Certification Standards.

Create Specialty Timber and Honey Production Zones:

Manage suitable areas of public forest (disturbed, old growth elements) on a low volume extraction basis, for sustainable specialty timbers and honey production.

Ensure that the scientific targets of the RFA are fulfilled, which involves securing protection for forest communities in Private Land which are required to meet the Comprehensive and Adequate Reserve (CAR) criteria. This will require:

- immediate implementation of the CARSAG expert advice to government on protection of biodiversity on private land;
- a more strategic approach;
- potential allocation of additional funds.

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3. Industry restructure

Higher Efficiency, Integration of Timber Production with Value Added Manufacturing, Changed Wood Allocation and Pricing Criteria:

A positive change in focus towards high value-added production off a smaller native forest resource base, moving Tasmania away from the current high volume, low value forest industry characterised by record levels of woodchip and whole log exports.

Forest Industry Policy to be refocussed to:

- develop a job rich value adding stream, using native timbers and plantation wood to their highest value
- create new investment in new enterprise that can add economic value to the State, including financial and personal assistance to individuals to enable them to adjust to the necessary changes.

A key aspect is utilisation of Tasmania's existing plantation resource (approx 200,000 hectares) to expand domestic processing and create jobs (we estimate potential for 900 additional jobs in a range of diverse product options) – this has the capacity to more than compensate for jobs lost in logging high conservation value forests.

Wood allocation and pricing mechanisms for the public resource to be reworked to achieve maximum recovery of timber from each tree, and maximum downstream processing and job creation through integrating final manufacturing stages with initial processing stages.

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4. Assistance Package

Tasmanian Forest Industry Restructure to be enabled and supported through a funded Assistance Package. The three major elements are:

- worker assistance;
- industry development assistance
- business exit assistance

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5. Review Institutional Arrangements

Establish a Royal Commission, change self-regulation, and end Forestry Tasmania exemptions from state legislation for example Freedom of Information and planning and environment laws.

Further information: Tasmanian Greens Forest Transition Strategy available at **www.tas.greens.org.au**