
[Australia: Strong allegation against destructive monoculture tree farms](#)

The Plantation 2020 Vision (The Federal Government's programme aimed at establishing 650,000 hectares of tree plantations in Tasmania over the next twenty years - see WRM Bulletins N° 37, 55, 64) draws upon and extends Tasmania's violent history of dispossession, when the fate of the indigenous population was to be elbowed out of the way by Europeans.

With shades of the doctrine of 'terra nullius', the initiation of the Tasmanian 'Protection of Agricultural Land Policy' (PAL) in 1997 ensured that existing landholders were and are denied the opportunity to build on existing lots of less than 40 hectares. Multiple occupancy is banned altogether and subdivision severely restricted.

Simultaneously, large corporations were cashed up by Federal and State Government and provided privileged taxation status. The corporations moved in for the kill and offered artificially low prices to landholders who could no longer use their land effectively nor sell their land to anybody else. No one else had the money.

It's clear that the 'forest' companies want free trees - not fair or free trade. The Tasmanian Government's corporate forestry division has literally handed over more than 100,000 hectares of land to multinationals - free of charge - and continues to sell our native forests at prices far less than their replacement level.

The people of Tasmania want to protect our unique forests. Many trees are some 90 metres tall and are several hundreds of years old - standing in old-age at the time Van Diemen "discovered" this island. Precious myrtle, sassafras, Huon pine, blackwood are mixed with eucalypts and other native species. These are our beautiful and biodiverse native forests. But the corporate Plantation 2020 Vision and similar industry thefts have already turned most of them into woodchips or wasted them in fires on the forest floor.

In order to ensure that local people have no say in the replacement of our forests and farms to monoculture tree farms, local planning schemes are worded so that community input into "forestry" coupe placement, design, composition, maintenance and frequency is disallowed completely.

Our language is commandeered -its meaning twisted with the aim to deceive. Industry calls a clear-felled old-growth forest now replaced with stick like monoculture and alien trees a "forest". Thus, the Federal Government makes claims that Australia's "forest" cover has increased whilst the rate of destruction of our biodiversity is historically unprecedented. Tasmania is the last refuge of a significant remnant of old growth forest in Australia. This is why our forests are currently being gutted. Forestry Tasmania's TV ads reassuringly tell us that "40% of our native forests are locked away and protected in reserves". In fact, around 39% of Tasmania is in reserves, but it isn't all forest! A large percentage consists of Button Grass plains, rocky mountain ranges, the flooded Lake Pedder, Tea-Tree scrub, stunted Snow Gum forests and various inlets and harbours. Whilst these wild places are precious and deserve protection, they do not represent 40% of remaining old-growth forest.

“Wealth” has no other meaning in industry parlance other than low-paid insecure jobs and shareholder dividends. Small landowners, however, have a different attitude toward wealth. They manage their forests not as an undifferentiated commodity but as multi-purpose properties with timber being but one asset. Recreational, development, ecological and spiritual value of our native trees far outstrip its value as woodchip fodder.

We are poisoned by a huge broad-acre industrial scale pesticide application and belching forestry burn offs. Huge chunks of clearfelled native forest is piled up in windrows and burnt. When a 12 year plantation is harvested the tops of the trees comprising most of the biomass is collected in piles also and set alight. This continues for months each Autumn, whilst the forest industry queues for “carbon credits” under the provisions of the Kyoto Protocol.

Residual and carcinogenic pesticides are now found in the vast majority of our creeks and rivers and now in our rainwater tanks. These dangerous chemicals are repeatedly applied over the same communities each year in a manner that GUARANTEES drift many kilometres beyond the inadequate buffer zones specified in industry-worded Codes of Practice.

Forestry corporations are free from general legislative control and transparency measures. Legislated regulations are not enforced unless huge public pressure is brought to bear. The industry is left to self-regulate in an abandoned countryside with few human observers left.

In an era of mass extinctions - heralding an environmental crisis of enormous magnitude - here in Australia wild, unmanaged stands of trees are forbidden, lest the nation's paper economy be hurt.

Change is painful for politicians but the other option isn't worth considering.

Extracted from a letter from Brenda J Rosser to the Editor of Community Forestry E-News, sent by the author, E-mail: shelter@tassie.net.au