

Ms Jenny Weber

Huon Valley Environment Centre Inc

PO Box 217 Huonville TAS 7109

Em: [jweber@nativeforest.net](mailto:jweber@nativeforest.net)

5.3.2014

THE SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS  
REFERENCES COMMITTEE

### **Inquiry into the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area**

Our campaigners and members of the Huon Valley Environment Centre have advocated for the World Heritage listing of the regions of the Huon district since 2002. Our deep knowledge of the forests that were listed in June 2013 has been gained from research, presence in the forests and lobbying of Governments and the World Heritage Committee.

The natural world heritage values of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA) minor boundary extension passed in June 2013 have had rigorous scientific proof of their outstanding universal values.

Further to the areas that were listed in June 2013, we lobbied for areas to be added to the TWWHA that were removed due to industry pressure, we opposed these areas in the Huon region being removed under industry instruction from the June 2013 listing. Areas that include a karst quarry in the Weld Valley, a region in the Picton Valley that could have been regenerated and would have added to the integrity of the TWWHA boundary, also a rainforest region in the Esperance, known to Forestry Tasmania as EP048C and an old growth forest in the Arve named AR050F by Forestry Tasmania. These excisions illustrate that the minor boundary addition in June 2013 was already tampered with by logging and mining industry pressure.

It was however a significant region of forest that was added to the TWWHA in June 2013. The claims made to justify the current proposal to remove 74 000ha from the TWWHA are incorrect. We are opposed to the proposal to remove 74 000ha from the TWWHA and we request that the Liberal Government withdraw the application from the World Heritage Committee.

The Abbott government claims that the 74 000ha of forest is badly degraded and logged, which is incorrect as indicated by the expert assessments recommending this area for inclusion into the TWWH. While there has been some logging in the newly listed regions, it has impacted a very small percentage of the area. There is a very large area of forest that

has been proposed to be de-listed that is intact forest, contiguous with vast tracts of wilderness regions and habitat for endangered and threatened species.

The areas contain some of the world's most pristine forests, including some of the tallest hardwood forests on Earth, intact ecosystems of 'outstanding universal value'.

The Federal Government has applied to remove areas containing the world's tallest flowering plants. Giant trees that are superlative examples of individual tall Eucalyptus trees are located in the Picton Valley in the Huon region, in the newly listed TWWHA and now threatened by the proposed de-listing. Amongst angiosperms, these tall trees are the most extreme example of gigantism in the plant kingdom.<sup>i</sup>

In the 2013 minor boundary addition the important recognition and protection of a corridor of tall eucalyptus forests added a new dimension to the TWWHA. The proposed delisting will remove a large quantity of this corridor. The tall eucalyptus forests that were added in June 2013 to the TWWHA, form a near continuous connected ribbon of forest extending for more than 180 km. With eucalyptus having a global diversity of over 800 species, the tall eucalyptus forest ecosystem is arguably the most superlative expression of this genus. Remnant tall eucalypt forests in Tasmania are concentrated in a tract extending from Recherche, near the southern tip, to the Upper Derwent in the centre.<sup>ii</sup> The connectivity of these forests and allowing for ongoing ecological processes was achieved in the June 2013 listing.<sup>iii</sup>

The fact that there are logged coupes inside the newly listed world heritage area does not mean that the areas should not have been included. Some of these coupes are positioned in areas that are surrounded by intact world heritage value forests. Some of the new roads were built by Forestry Tasmania and logging coupes were abandoned due to a lack of money to continue with road building and lack of markets for the timber from the coupes, for example new logging roads and coupes such as North Weld Rd, another road in the Barnback region and a coupe in the Arve, on Crib Hill rd.

Further, these logged areas now have the opportunity to undergo rehabilitation and regeneration, left to return to their natural state rather than placed on a rotation for logging again. It was with this understanding that the World Heritage Committee made their decision.

There are logged coupes within the area that was added to the TWWHA in June 2013. We have conducted campaigns in opposition to the logging and road building in these forests as they have been clearfelled and fire-bombed over the past twelve years.

Over the past twelve years of Huon Valley Environment Centre's operations there have been some very controversial logging coupes in the Huon region under the control of the Labor Government. We called for the cessation of these logging operations at the time due to

their recognised world heritage values, these logging coupes in the Weld Valley, Picton Valley, Arve, Esperance, Lune River and Catamaran.

Further our organisation pressured the Government to halt the logging in these areas as was promised in a moratorium on logging in 2011. The logging of these world heritage values continued right up until weeks before the listing in June 2013. This logging and the ongoing loss of globally significant forests was preventable by the previous Federal Government and the current State Government.

Now the rehabilitation and regeneration of these areas with a view to conservation and long term ecological restoration should be a priority for the current government. Not the return to logging in these regions.

The extent of degraded forests in the newly listed World Heritage area are manageable for both the State and Federal Governments to prioritise funding for weed removal, invasive species control and rehabilitation. A priority should be given to the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) to be allocated funding to undertake appropriate management of these areas. It is a concern that funding was provided for this purpose in the recent funding announcements to an environmental signatory to the Tasmanian Forest Agreement. Rather funding should be prioritised to the NPWS who have the expertise and experience to manage this restoration programme.

Adding the regions in June 2013 was able to rectify a long held legacy of the rapacious logging industry, assisted by the State and Federal Governments to an inappropriate World Heritage boundary. It was not a boundary that was determined by a lack of World Heritage values in the forests that were outside the previous TWWHA, it was a boundary that was ruled by the logging industry interests. The newly listed TWWHA recognised in 2013 provides an opportunity to establish a more appropriate World Heritage boundary that included arbitrary contour lines across the face of a mountain range, mountain ranges that flanked either side of large valleys of intact forests, wild rivers and karst, including significant indigenous heritage.

Forest regions in the Huon district that are proposed to be removed by the Abbott Government include the following;

#### **Cockle Creek – Recherche – Hastings**

This tract of eucalypt forests comprises the largest of two of the southernmost occurrences of eucalypt forest in Australia. The eucalypt forests in the region south of the D'Entrecasteaux River to Cockle Creek include some of the most southerly tracts of eucalypt forest in Australia, indeed the world. It is the important final component of the corridor of tall eucalypt forest that extends down the eastern side of the old boundary. It encloses and helps to protect fragile alpine environments in the TWWHA.<sup>iv</sup> The eucalypt forests of this narrow lowland corridor are an integral part of a still existing natural connectivity of tall eucalypt communities.<sup>v</sup>

The natural diversity of this small forest complex is at the southern latitudinal limits of the Australian eucalypt and rainforest flora and fauna. The globally significant eucalypts here can be expected to be of enduring scientific interest, especially given the historic research conducted by the French scientists in this region.

The Recherche section includes valleys and plains adjacent to glaciated ranges that preserve depositional evidence of glaciations. The forests in this section comprise mostly forested hill slopes, foothills and some coastal plains. The proposed addition, while having some significant impacts from logging and associated roading in recent years, is partly within identified wilderness areas and has potential to recover from this disturbance.<sup>vi</sup>

This area provides the best opportunity to capture the full range of elevation values in the TWWHA—of significant benefit to the ecological function and integrity of the TWWHA and particularly important to assist adaptation to climate change.<sup>vii</sup>

### **Hastings – Esperance – Hartz**

This section contains rainforest, tall-eucalypt forests and the balance of the Hastings Caves karst system. The Federal Government proposes to remove all the forests of the Hastings, Esperance and Hartz, except a small region around the Hastings Caves system.

Lower altitude old-growth tall eucalypt forests with high scenic qualities and continuous with the upper forested slopes of mountains such as Adamsons Peak and the Hartz Mountains were added to the TWWHA in June 2013. These forests are part of the contiguous band of tall eucalypt forest that were, prior to June 2013, outside the eastern edge of the property. Their inclusion extended the altitudinal range of this ecosystem and added integrity to the TWWHA.<sup>viii</sup>

The post June 2013 section of boundary of the TWWHA between Hastings Caves in the south and Hartz National Park in the north epitomises the boundary deficiencies of much of the eastern boundary of the TWWHA. The entire length of this section of boundary was defined by a contour, mostly on steep slopes. The boundary was an artefact of an earlier period where boundaries were drawn for political expedience rather than capture of important conservation values, ecological processes or manageability.<sup>ix</sup>

### **Picton – Weld**

The proposed removal of areas from the TWWHA includes the entire region of the Picton Valley that was added in June 2013 and a large region of the Lower Weld Valley. The threatened forests of the Weld Valley, along with the Picton and Huon Valleys, were identified in the independent verification process as being collectively part of the largest single tract of tall eucalypt forest ecosystem extant in Tasmania.<sup>x</sup> This area is home to possibly the highest recorded fungi diversity in the world and would make a significant contribution to protecting globally significant populations of ancient, relictual fauna.<sup>xi</sup>

Large tracts of forests in these regions proposed to be removed remain unlogged to date, with large tracts of unroaded wilderness forests. They have contributed a new complementary 'lowland' or lower valley manifestation of attributes that were already within the TWWHA, for example glacial, karst, tall eucalypt forest and rainforest.<sup>xii</sup>

The Picton, being a shorter valley than the Weld and Huon Valleys, is almost a 'blind valley' hemmed in by alpine and rainforest communities on three sides. These characteristics are illustrative of the substantial ecological diversity evident in the tall eucalypt and rainforest communities in the 'Three Valleys'.<sup>xiii</sup>

The Picton Valley, along with the Huon and the Weld Valleys, is one of the few areas in Tasmania where there is a major concentration of tall eucalypt-rainforest ecosystems and where the forests are mostly intact with potential for ongoing natural processes to operate. Notwithstanding that some parts of the forests have been subject to industrial-scale logging operations, the combination of the intact forests and the option of being able to naturally rehabilitate the logged areas, means the 'Three Valleys' forests still offer outstanding potential for conservation, including maintaining natural processes.<sup>xiv</sup>

In the Weld Valley, some of the areas being delisted are regarded as some of the most impressive tall eucalypt forest over rainforest anywhere.<sup>xv</sup> The Weld may be characterised as an archipelago of eucalypt forest in a sea of rainforest. The Weld has the greatest development of rainforest. There is substantial interaction with temperate rainforest including many tall eucalypt 'islands' within rainforest-dominated landscapes. On the north side of the Weld River, the tall eucalypt forest is both well-developed and intimately mixed with temperate rainforests.<sup>xvi</sup> The region in the Eddy Creek/Glovers Bluff has significant geo-conservation values. A visually striking geological feature where the Weld River flows, a strike ridge that is rare so far east, which comprises button grass moorland embedded in rainforest and tall eucalyptus.<sup>xvii</sup>

## **Russell**

The entire region of the Russell forests that connect the Weld Valley to the Styx Valley have been proposed to be removed. The boundary prior to June 2013 of the TWWHA in this region was inappropriate in terms of capturing the ecological diversity of the natural vegetation. There has been long held concern about the vulnerability of the alpine communities of the Snowy Range to the impacts of industrial forestry operations on steep slopes immediately below the alpine communities. Escape of fire from forestry activities is an ongoing threat to the TWWHA and is a particular threat to the alpine environment.<sup>xviii</sup>

By adding the tall eucalyptus forests of the Russell region, intact ecosystems and some areas disturbed by logging, meant that it contributed to the integrity of the TWWHA, in particular by: extending protection of the full natural ecological/vegetation sequence downslope from the alpine environment into the regionally dominant eucalypt forests; facilitating natural ecological processes, including fire over a greater altitudinal range than was the case and facilitating maintenance of ecological connectivity in the tall eucalypt ecosystem within the boundaries of the TWWHA.<sup>xix</sup>

In conclusion, the forested regions of the newly listed TWWHA are world-class forests that now have world-class recognition. These forests need to have their protection from human impacts secured forever, the damage that has been done by logging over the years in a small area of this region has been irresponsible and ecologically degrading. However with a well-funded restoration program and a willingness to leave the forests to return in these logged areas, they will add to the integrity of the TWWHA.

**Australia has an international duty to protect, conserve, present, rehabilitate and transmit** to future generations, the TWWHA as it is now, post June 2013, including the 123 500ha of previous state forest that were listed in June 2013. Removing 74 000ha of the TWWHA would breach Australia's international treaty obligations, damage Australia's reputation and leave a large area of intact globally significant tall eucalyptus forests and wild rivers threatened.

The international World Heritage Committee, by inscribing the extension forests on the World Heritage List, legally acknowledged their outstanding universal value. Delisting then logging these forests would contravene our treaty obligations.

The Federal Government has a duty to maintain the current boundary of the TWWHA, furthermore they have a duty to rehabilitate the areas within the TWWHA.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry.

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<sup>i</sup> Hitchcock, Peter. (2011) IVG Forest Conservation Report 5A, Verification of the Heritage Value of ENGO-Proposed Reserves, An assessment and verification of the '*National and World Heritage Values and significance of Tasmania's native forest estate with particular reference to the area of Tasmanian forest identified by ENGOs as being of High Conservation Value.*' For the Independent Verification Group for the Tasmanian Forests Intergovernmental Agreement 2011.

<sup>ii</sup> ibid

<sup>iii</sup> ibid

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid

<sup>v</sup> ibid

<sup>vi</sup> ibid

<sup>vii</sup> ibid

<sup>viii</sup> ibid

<sup>ix</sup> ibid

<sup>x</sup> ibid

<sup>xi</sup> ibid

<sup>xii</sup> ibid

<sup>xiii</sup> ibid

<sup>xiv</sup> ibid

<sup>xv</sup> Hitchcock Peter, on ABC news, 3.2.2014 <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-02-03/pressure-grows-for-federal-government-to-delist-more-of-tasmani/5233640> & in the Australian Newspaper 4.2.2014 <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/greg-hunts-tasmanian-forestry-claims-misleading/story-fn59niix-1226817045249#>

<sup>xvi</sup> Hitchcock, Peter. (2011)

<sup>xvii</sup> Cracknell, Matt. "Reconnaissance mapping of the Eddy Creek karst system in the Lower Weld Valley, Tasmania." *Speleo Spiel*. Issue 358, January – February 2007. & Forestry Tasmania, <http://www.forestrytas.com.au/uploads/File/pdf/foi2008/FOI08-3.pdf>

<sup>xviii</sup> Hitchcock, Peter. (2011)

<sup>xix</sup> ibid