

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
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The Huon Resource Development Group inc. submits to the Committee that Australia's environment is robust, and is extremely well managed in comparison to the rest of the world. Nowhere is this more evident than in Tasmania, where the Committee recently concluded that vast areas of forest managed in the past for timber production, mining and human endeavour were of such a pristine condition that they should be added to the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area.

Tasmania currently has over 50% of its terrestrial land mass, its environment, within conservation reserves. This compares with the 17% target recommended in the international Convention on Biological Diversity.

Tasmania has also decreased its carbon dioxide equivalent emissions by 34% between 1990, (the Kyoto base year), and 2011, which was the year before a carbon price (tax) was imposed. Such a massive decrease demonstrates what sustainable forest management, as advocated by the current Federal Government, can do.

In fact, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concurs:

"In the long term, a sustainable forest management strategy aimed at maintaining or increasing forest carbon stocks, while producing an annual sustained yield of timber, fibre or energy from the forest, will generate the largest sustained mitigation benefit."

Nabuurs, G.J.et al, 2007: Forestry. In Climate Change 2007: Mitigation. Contribution of Working Group III to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [B. Metz, O.R. Davidson, P.R. Bosch, R. Dave, L.A. Meyer (eds)], Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA.

Yet such a strategy was almost destroyed by the Committee's recommendation to expand the World Heritage Area, a perverse outcome in relation to the World Heritage Convention.

The HRDG believes that the Government is returning the management of Australia's environment back to a sustainable basis, providing funding at an appropriate level, and seeking a balanced outcome for the environment, the economy and Australian society. It is building upon our natural heritage and future prosperity.

An important part of striking this balance is having the right framework in place for the conservation and sustainable management of our forests.

A cornerstone of this framework is the 1992 National Forest Policy Statement, jointly developed by the previous Labor Government in consultation with the State and Territory governments.

Pivotal to this approach, and arising from the policy statement, was the development of Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs).

RFAs are 20-year plans which deliver the right balance between conservation and sustainable production in native forests.

The Rudd government was fully committed to RFAs as the primary mechanism to sustain jobs and support industry, to ensure high conservation values, and for the protection of biodiversity and threatened species.

They form the central pillar of our national forest policy framework.

A total of 10 RFAs, covering most of Australia's major native forestry regions, were endorsed between the Commonwealth and the states of New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia and Tasmania between 1997 and 2001.

RFAs were developed on the back of the largest scientific assessment and stakeholder consultation processes ever undertaken for Australia's forests.

The agreements have delivered significant environmental outcomes, including Australia's world class forest reserve system.

Currently, more than 3 million hectares of Australia's native forests are protected in formal nature conservation reserves, as defined by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

18 per cent of Australia's total native forest estate is now formally protected in reserves, up from 10 per cent in 1998.

About 4.8 million hectares of Australia's native forests are contained within World Heritage-listed areas.

More than 75 per cent, or more than five million hectares, of Australia's known old-growth forests are now protected within reserves.

Significant conservation outcomes are also being achieved outside the reserve system.

Central to the RFAs was the development of a rigorous sustainable forest management framework to ensure the environmental protection of key forest values including biodiversity, soil and water, and cultural heritage.

Strict codes of practice now underpin the management of production forests to protect these values.

In addition to the regulatory framework, many forest managers have achieved independent certification of high-quality forest management through internationally recognised forest certification schemes.

Australia's various RFAs, and their underpinning frameworks, have been effective in delivering this environmental protection for forests within those regions.

As 20-year agreements, the RFAs ensure environmental protection whilst providing the certainty for industry to invest in its future.

Carbon pricing, the Clean Energy Finance Corporation, the Australian Renewable Energy Agency and the Renewable Energy Target, the Climate Change Authority and the Climate Commission have all proved ineffective and riddled with inconsistency and red tape. As an example, the vast majority of Tasmania's wonderful hydro-electric schemes are ineligible for renewable energy recognition. The burning of wood from native forests is said to be renewable if it meets certain rules, and non-renewable if not, clearly a ridiculous red tape nightmare!

The Constitution developed for our nation handed the powers of land management to the states, and it was only after the signing of an international treaty (not subject to a referendum) that the Federal Government become involved in environmental protection. As a Federation, approval powers should be returned to state governments, which are more than capable of carrying out such tasks.

The HRDG supports the cuts to the Federal funding of the Environmental Defenders Offices, as this is nothing more than legal aid for greenies! Funding for community environment organisations, Landcare and Caring for our Country must be reduced to affordable levels, and be matched by private sector investment.

Australia must review its participation in the World Heritage Convention, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the Ramsar Convention, as these have become little more than an excuse for an annual two week party by delegates at the world's best hotels. This was witnessed in the recent fiasco of extending the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, where in 2013 a 172,000 ha addition was considered 'minor', and not requiring an independent review of evidence, and yet the much smaller excision in 2014 was rejected.

Again the HRDG asks the Committee to visit and view the extended area, and as it failed to do so in its last inquiry, asks that the previous submission made to it by this group be reconsidered by this Committee.

Members of the HRDG will be happy to provide evidence to the Committee, and asks that this evidence be given in a hearing convened in the Tasmanian forest, part of Australia's well managed environment.

Yours sincerely,

George Harris

President

Huon Resource Development Group Inc.