

Huon Resource Development Group
31 March 2014 - Hobart
Tasmanian Wilderness inquiry

27/02/2013

Kishore Rao
Director
World Heritage Centre
UNESCO
7, Place de Fontenoy
75352 Paris 07 SP
France

Dear Kishore Rao,

I hereby register my formal objection to the nomination to extend the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area by the inclusion of an additional 170,000 hectares, and call on you and the World Heritage Committee to reject the nomination at the 37th Session to be held in Phnom Penh in June 2013.

My objection is based on the contention that:

- the nomination has serious errors of description,
- the nomination was created out of an abuse of process and a disregard for accepted protocols,
- the nomination is based on unsafe information,
- the nomination was developed in a circumstance of exclusiveness and aversion to consultation of stakeholders,
- the nomination was made in contravention of the terms of an agreement between the Prime Minister of Australia and the Premier of Tasmania on aspects of the future of the timber industry in Tasmania,
- the nomination was made without the full and proper consideration of the Parliament of Tasmania,
- the nomination was made without a mandate from the Australian and Tasmanian governments, and in contravention of previous mandates,
- the nomination will have a substantially detrimental impact on social, economic and cultural values and activities,
- the nomination will bring hardship, loss of amenity, loss of utility, and a potential threat to personal safety to freehold titleholders adjoining the boundary of the extended TWWHA if approved.

Evidence given under oath to the Tasmanian Legislative Council's Select Committee of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Forest Agreement Bill has noted that a clause of the Agreement between signatories from the timber industry and the ENGO's (Environment Non-Government Organizations) was the basis for the nomination, and that the nomination be made in time to be considered at the 37th Session. However, I and many others believe that of the eight negotiators, the four timber industry representatives negotiated under duress and the threat of continuation of unreasonable sabotage of markets and timber industry companies. Extension of the TWWHA was a condition of "peace" in the remaining forests, but the terms of the agreement constitute an unreasonable surrender of valuable forests lands and a social and economic threat to those who wish to remain in the industry, or wish to see the industry continue. Many who should have been consulted were actively excluded from this process, and the full consideration of the Parliament of Tasmania has yet to be concluded, which in itself is in contravention of accepted protocols. Further, the lands that are the subject of the proposed extension are not and have never been listed on the Australian National Heritage List, which is a further abuse and contravention of accepted protocols.

The nomination has serious errors of description in that it is fundamentally a significant extension, not a minor extension, in that it will have substantially detrimental impacts on economic, social and cultural activities, in particular the capacity for the continuation of the arts-based Special Timbers manufacturing sector, and the capacity to access and harvest the famous Leatherwood honey and maintain these unique and high-value industries.

The Special Timbers sector is based around species that are endemic to Tasmania, and which are mostly slow to very slow growing, and which occur in specific and limited areas of the state, mostly the western third of the state. These timbers are the basis of an industry comprising quality furniture, wood turning, sculpture, wooden boat building, musical instrument making, and souvenirs for the tourism retail market. These timbers are distinctly different from all other Australian timbers, and present an unusual range of colours, density, texture, grain patterns and working characteristics. Huon Pine, King Billy Pine and Celery-top Pine are internationally recognised as among the best boat building timbers on the planet, and all are slow growing. All are carefully managed, and annual supply is limited to 500 cubic meters or less. Almost all the living stands of these three species are already in the existing TWWHA, and sustainable supply as a consequence of the proposed extension would be 200 m³ or less. This is unacceptable and must be opposed. The impact is similar for the species of Myrtle and Blackheart Sassafras, which are favoured by the craft and furniture industries.

The Leatherwood tree would similarly be mostly found only within the boundaries of the TWWHA if the proposed extension were to proceed. The management of the property is likely to result in access roads and tracks being closed or deteriorating to a state where bee keepers would not be able to gain access and service hives. The existing management of the current property has already shown a lack of capacity and preparedness to maintain vehicular access. Green groups are currently agitating to have existing roads in nominated areas rehabilitated to their natural state.

The nomination for extension relies on information that came from a verification process that I and many believe to have been corrupt and corrupted, and is unsafe. I believe it is important that the World Heritage Committee examines this, and for its own sake does not place its reputation at stake. I believe the World Heritage Committee should not support a nomination that does not have the expressed support of the community to which it affects, or where there is a level of anger and conflict.

The nomination has been driven by the supporters of the Green Party, which has disproportionate influence over minority governments in the House of Assembly in Hobart and the House of Representatives in Canberra and balance of power in the national Senate while having little more than ten per cent support of the voters. This circumstance has arisen only since the most recent state and national elections, and such a significant WHA nomination should be tested before the electorate. Significantly, the nomination does not have the support of the alternative government parties at either the state of Tasmania or the national Australian government level.

On the question of personal safety of landowners, it must be understood that the nomination of extension would result in a change of management of fire-prone forest adjoining private freehold boundaries. This is causing great alarm, and must be the subject of thorough investigation by the WHA Committee.

I conclude by re-stating my firm belief that this nomination is in error, that it cannot be considered a 'Minor Extension', that it is made based on information that is unsafe, and that it would bring the World Heritage Committee into conflict and disrepute.

I urge that you consider this very carefully,

Yours sincerely,

George Harris

Furniture designer/manufacturer in Tasmanian Special Timbers
Chairman, Fine Timbers Tasmania inc. (see www.chainofcustody.com.au)
Committee member, Furniture Designers Association inc.
Committee member and past President, Woodcraft Guild Tasmania inc.
President, Huon Resource Development Group