

To: enquiry@rpdc.tas.gov.au
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Subject: Submission to RPDC re Pulp Mill

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Submission to the Resource Planning and Development Commission regarding the Integrated Impact Statement (IIS) relating to Gunns' proposed Pulp Mill.

Tasmania's State of Public Health Report 2003's concluding statement is:

“Tasmania's most precious resources are the health of its people and its environment. These cannot be separated from each other and their continued protection is the key to our future.”

The above comment is absolutely fundamental to the approach that should be taken in caring for our ecosystems and people.

WHO (1946) defines health in this way: “health is the state of complete physical or mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”.

In the 2003 Report, Tasmania is demonstrated to have:

- 2.4% of Australia's total population
- an ageing population and the highest proportion nationally of people over the age of 65 predicted by 2016
- a higher unemployment rate than the national average
- the second lowest life expectancy compared with national average - only Northern Territory is higher
- the third-highest infant mortality rate - higher than the national average
- a significantly higher number of cancer deaths (age standardised) compared with the national average - on average cancer claims almost 3 lives per day in Tasmania (2003 report)
- a higher number of cardiovascular deaths (age standardised) compared with the national average
- a significantly higher “all causes of death” mortality rate (age standardised) compared with the national average
- a self reporting of poor health (2001) above the national average, and self reporting of good to excellent health below the national average
- a prevalence of diabetes in Tasmania amongst the highest described internationally and higher than the national average

At extremely low levels of exposure, chemicals, especially dioxins, furans, PCBs, and others (including pesticides) have been shown to cause many biological effects, some of which are not comprehensively tested for during assessment under present government regulatory requirements. These include immune suppression, endocrine disruption and epigenetic changes. Unborn and new babies are the most

vulnerable to these effects, as their immune systems are very susceptible to damage along with other still developing systems. The sick and the elderly are other groups, which are increasingly vulnerable to these adverse effects as their systems are already compromised. Some chemicals allow other chemicals to cause harm later, i.e. “the window of opportunity”, and of course this is all dependant on what chemicals the individual had on board initially. All these changes play a significant role in producing various diseases and illnesses including cancers, cardiovascular disease, and metabolic syndrome (obesity and Type II diabetes). In the young they contribute to behavioural problems such as attention disorders and autism.

Taken together with an individual's lifestyle and basic genetic makeup, the net effect becomes evident, producing today's “epidemics”.

The cost of the increase in illness and morbidity is significant to the individual, the community and the government. In the USA for example, these new epidemics e.g. cancer, cardiovascular disease and metabolic syndrome are estimated to cost approximately \$640 billion annually. It is significant that the first and only large study of children (100,000) designed to track them from conception to 21, has been cancelled, due to a loss of funding from President Bush's proposed budget for 2007. It was designed by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and was planned to examine many different factors affecting development including environmental chemicals and diet. It is important to note that diseases caused by environmental interference with gene behaviour may be preventable if the contaminants are identified and exposure is eliminated.

In light of the above, Tasmania should not permit establishment of another industry demonstrated to produce toxic bio-accumulating pollutants and known to also cause interference with gene behaviour. These pollutants will contaminate our air, our waters and our soil.

It is essential that a health impact assessment is undertaken to determine whether the combined toxic effects produced by these pollutants together with those that we already have, are a risk worth taking.

It is fundamental that during these processes the precautionary principle is upheld.

Alison Bleaney

References

www.ourstolenfuture.org.au