

Executive Commissioner
Resource Planning and Development Commission
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Submission on the Bell Bay Pulp Mill



The world's first hardwood-based newsprint mill shortly after its start-up in 1941 by Australian Newsprint Mills Ltd. at Boyer, Tasmania

As Australia's most forested State, Tasmania has been an innovator and leader in the Nation's Pulp and Paper Industry. The proposed Bleached Eucalypt Kraft Pulp Mill at Bell Bay in the Tamar Valley will continue the tradition of Australian firms investing in cutting edge technology to value add our sustainable forest resource for long term social and economic benefit.

The Executive Summary of the Integrated Impact Statement for the Tamar Valley Mill details substantial social and economic benefits to the State; these appear to be of the same magnitude as the long term advantages gained since the world's first hardwood-based newsprint mill started in 1941 at Boyer, in the Derwent Valley by Australian Newsprint Mills Ltd.

As a resident of the Derwent Valley and with some first hand knowledge of the operations of the Newsprint Mill and its timber supply, I believe I can attest to the likely social and economic impacts of a major mill to create pulp from our renewable timber resource.

Much of the research leading to the establishment of the Derwent Valley mill, that was to pulp the native hardwood, was underwritten by the Nation's newspaper companies that were looking to replace expensive imported newsprint. The newspaper companies that undertook the development at Boyer as Australian Newsprint Mills Ltd (ANM) were John Fairfax & Sons, The Herald and Weekly Times, Associated Newspapers, Advertiser Newspaper, Queensland Newspapers, West Australian Newspapers and Davies Brothers Ltd (publishers of Tasmania's *The Mercury*).

ANM had a paid up capital of 1.8 million pounds, preference capital of a million and debenture stock provided by the National Bank of Australia and some reserves built up in the thirties. The investment at Boyer was reported to be 5.65 million pounds, in terms of a commitment at the end of the 1930s, this investment figure is in the same order of magnitude of the \$1.4 billion investment planned for today's Tamar Valley mill.

The Derwent Valley Mill now owned by international paper maker Norske Skog is still going strong today in 2006, sixty five years after it first opened. It has employed thousands of Tasmanians over a number of generations and provided economic wealth to the town of New Norfolk, the Derwent Valley and Southern Tasmania.

The mill as a major corporate citizen of the State has provided scholarships, community support by way of gifts and donations as well as in-kind support. It has purchased goods and services from local businesses, contractors and professional firms, and supported local community groups, charities and sporting teams.

Since inception the mill has sought to minimize its environmental impact, as effluent is discharged to the Derwent River and emissions to the air. One could imagine the concerns related to airborne pollution due to the blanketing of Hobart and suburbs by the "Bridgewater Jerry" on hundreds, if not thousands of winter mornings. The technology of sixty five years ago has greatly improved to reduce emissions and the mill now meets strict modern guidelines. Despite sixty five years of operation the Derwent Valley is still considered by tourists as picturesque and unaffected by industrial pollution found in other states and countries.

To secure the investment in paper production in the depression years of the 1930's the State Government provided ANM with a concession to the virgin old growth forests of the Styx, Russell and Florentine Valleys. This large concession in the head waters of the Derwent River was beyond the then economic range of the sawmilling industry and in difficult mountainous areas. Over the years the Mill invested heavily in rail and road infrastructure and in its people, foresters and timber workers to maximize the return from these forests.

The vision was to provide 70,000 tons of newsprint annually (now 280,000 tons) from these forests on a sustainable basis allowing 45 to 50 years for regeneration. Despite 65 years of industrial forestry the Valleys of the Styx, Russell and Florentine are highly valued by both the conservation movement and the timber industry. They are said to contain high conservation values and commercial attractive specialty timbers and high quality saw logs. The Mill reserved some parts of the forests voluntarily but much of the regrowth is confused by visitors today who think that they are viewing high quality wilderness as they drive along the logging roads.

Despite the massive disturbance in the head waters of the Derwent that could have been expected to occur, the Derwent has been a major source of Hobart's drinking water. The Derwent River remains a major site for recreation

including rowing, fishing and sailing. It remains a dominant feature of the Capital City's landscape with most visitors thinking it pristine.

Although the majority of harvesting in the Styx and Florentine Valleys to supply timber for the nation's newspapers was undertaken before the introduction of today's modern forest practices code and the reservation of biological diversity requirements of the National Forest Policy Statement, harvesting was done under the supervision of qualified foresters.

These foresters were encouraged to be innovative and research was a priority of the mill. This philosophy saw the research into the ecology of the forests and how best to regenerate those forests, the role of fire in the regeneration process and the development of silviculture techniques such as clear fell burn and sow. Techniques to protect soil and water in these valleys have also become the basis of prescriptions now incorporated in the Forest Practices Code. It also saw the establishment of both softwood and hard wood plantations in the region including the Plenty Valley and over the years the development of determining sawlog quality and pulp quality in the harvested logs.

The experiences outlined above demonstrate that a pulp mill provides a very sustainable value adding industry that has minimum environmental impacts and provides major long term social and economic benefits. The Commission is urged to approve this new Pulp Mill in the Tamar Valley as soon as possible so that it creates a future similar to that enjoyed by fellow Derwent Valley residents for the last 65 years.

Respectfully yours,

John Webb