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RESOURCE PLANNING + DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION  
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HOBART 7000

AN  
IMPACT STATEMENT /  
SUBMISSION  
CONCERNING

WATER

AND

THREATENED COMMUNITIES

OF

TAMAR VALLEY

AND

NORTH EAST TASMANIA

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We will NOT make this presentation as a data-used, scientific work. There are enough competing statistics fighting against each other already. Others are dealing with that.

Instead, we would like to make observations and ask a number of questions concerning the proposed pulp mill at George Town, Tasmania. These observations and questions come from our personal expertise and observations gathered in the past three decades.

## BACKGROUND DATA:

We have travelled the world for many decades as visiting professors/lecturers in many countries. They include: USA, Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, Italy, Turkey, China, Japan, Marshall Islands and Korea. We have lived in twelve separate nations and are well qualified to make valid social comparisons and observations.

This peripatetic university teaching allowed us to visit up to 125 countries to various degrees of social depths. For instance, we were frequent visitors in Yugoslavia as it broke into various warring factions. We also found ourselves between a Turkish army and Kurdish hostiles. We are not strangers to social conflict.

Likewise we spent considerable time in European countries, especially Germany and Italy. We have experienced much in our travels; frequently very difficult happenings.

We found Sweden to be exceptional because they seem to have solved the tensions between the emerging modern problems: 1. "Development dynamism and 2. People protection". For example, in Sweden the government has committed itself to engineering all roads and highways in the nation to be as nearly perfect as possible. In other words, people are more important than epidemic development at all costs. Sweden now enjoys one of the lowest road death rates in the world. In Australia we still seem to have the "Black Spot" mental which is to warn motorists with signs.

It is to this "epidemic development", as we see the pulp mill, which we wish to address our submission.

As educators and parents of eight children (seven of whom attended Brooks High School, Launceston) we were always as interested in the life styles of these countries as we were in their social and industrial structures.

Also, as committed Tasmanians we were conscious of comparing other parts of the world with our Australian home. In most ways Australia compared favourably and sometimes we were better. Perhaps in sophistication we might not be able to match London or New York but that is as much a good aspect of Tasmania as not. Surprisingly, perhaps, we found that Tasmania was seldom far behind any Western country in modern expertise.

In life style our experience has been that Tasmania is equal to most Western countries and far ahead of the majority. Our clean air, water and evolutionary development have made for an envied way of life.

**Unfortunately our very way of life has been under heavy pressures** brought on by the modern era of Globalization. Unfortunately, again, globalisation is now more than heavy pressure. Our very social fabric is under threat. We can have little effect upon the globalizing trends of this post-modern era. However, we must address the problems of living today **where we are today**: Tasmania and more importantly to us, Northern Tasmania. The axiom, "Think globally and act locally" has never been more important.

We will only deal in this submission with what we consider to be the over arching threat to the communities and social fabric of Northern Tasmania: **the proposed pulp mill.**

We have the following concerns:

1. Water
2. Rural community demise

There were only a few countries in Europe where drinking water was tap water: Norway and Sweden come to mind. We lived next to the River Rhine and were frequently alerted to drink only bottled water because of toxic spills. In neither Italy nor Turkey did we even think about drinking tap water. France, for us, was little better. In China the only water we could be sure of was taken from steam engines placed appropriately for the university students' use. South Korea was no better and water from Pacific Island nations usually tasted of diesel because the airport tarmac was usually the main collector.

This pulp mill calls for billions of litres of water to be **GUARANTEED** for its use. This, we presume, means that the mill will get first use of South Esk Catchment water **ALWAYS**. Wait a minute. That water should first go to the people and be guaranteed **FOR THE PEOPLE** first and always.

It would seem that, in contrast to the Swedish principle, the Tasmanian government has their goals backwards. It should be **PEOPLE** first and development second. And, of course, drought is not unknown in Northern Tasmania. What does global warming offer for the future? **WE SIMPLY DO NOT KNOW.**

We are avid canoeists and have been on the Tamar River many times. Alas, recently we have had to forego canoeing because of the exposure of wide silt banks at low tide. Now even medium tides compound the problem through the widening and deepening of mud banks. If billions of litres of water are diverted **BY A PIPE** from the Trevallyn Dam through The Race (or, even worse, directly from the Trevallyn Dam) by definition, that water will not be available for scouring the silt laden upper reaches of the Tamar. In other words, the Tamar will not flush adequately. The Cataract Gorge will obviously suffer.

Picture two years of low rainfall in Northern Tasmania. This has happened before and probably will in the future. The Race gets the first water and from The Race the water is pumped to the mill: resulting in water restrictions in the metropolitan area. **THIS IS TANTAMOUNT TO THE MILL TAKING THE PEOPLE'S DRINKING WATER. HOW CAN THIS SITUATION EVEN BE CONTEMPLATED?**

The fetid horrors of a continual Tamar mud flat at permanent low tide is something we have seen and smelled and been horrified by in Turkey and other Third World countries. Without sufficient water for the Tamar that could happen in Launceston as well.

The basic question is, "How can our state government guarantee the **PEOPLE'S WATER** to a business whose purpose is to make a profit?"

**The first role of government is to protect, project and care for the people's commonweal.** Taking our drinking water for a possible small dividend to the benefit a large company is not only madness; it must be seen to be as ILLEGAL, regardless of laws that have been manipulated to allow for such illegalities.

**The foregoing is by preamble.** The following undergirds our submission.

We thank Dr. D.E. Leaman, Hydrologist, for his excellent scientific work which undergirds parts of the following observations. We have used some of his data in a non statistical manner. We conclude with our observations and questions.

NE Tasmania is in danger of erosion to the quality/quantity of our water resource. Some of this diminution has already occurred. Further diminution will continue to occur unless serious consideration is given to the following:

### **1. Climate Change**

- (a) Projection: Western Tasmanian will become wetter  
Eastern Tasmania will become drier and warmer
- (b) Ramifications: Projected climate change will severely reduce volume of NE Tasmanian rivers. This will have serious ramifications on water supply to agriculture, urban centres and the continued viability of the Forestry and other industries.
- (c) Evidence of Climate Change to Date: During the past 30 years total rainfall in Eastern Tasmania has reduced by approximately 8% – 15%. Changing vegetation, e.g. under storey is diminishing and wet schlerophyll is being replaced by drier schlerophyll.
- (d) Some communities are already experiencing a downgrade in water quality, e.g. St. Helens and Lilydale to name a few.
- (e) **Climate change is predicted to continue, i.e. drier and warmer in the E/NE.**

### **2. Additional to Climate Change**

- (a) Damage/destruction of upper wetland catchments: N.E Tasmanian river systems depend on the wet catchments of highland N. E. Tasmania. These wetland catchments are already threatened by continuing climate change. They are immediately threatened by clear felling in the upper reaches of the wetland catchments. This will enhance the detrimental effect on rural/urban centres and on the Forestry industry.
- (b) **Destruction of upper wetlands will be additional to the effect of climate change on water volumes in the NE**

**3. Water drainage** to plantations will further decrease water volume available to NE Tasmanian river systems.

**4. Erosion** due to clear felling on slopes of 10degrees plus will add to erosion already occurring due to poor farming practices.

5. **Siltation** due to erosion will add to the diminishing quality and volume of water. This will be detrimental to farming communities and urban communities, including Launceston.
6. **Fire** due to increasing areas of plantations, changes to vegetation from wetter to drier, drier soils due to diminution of runoff and ground water. The danger of fire applies to a wide area, including Launceston. **Note:** plantations are more susceptible to wildfires than wetter vegetation types.
7. **Social Ramifications** pertaining to rural communities due to farms selling out to Forestry industry, increasing isolation of remaining agricultural areas, shrinking rural settlements, diminution of land values, disappearing support to rural communities.

### **EFFECT OF THE ABOVE ON LAUNCESTON**

Due to the effects of the diminishing volume and quality of the South Esk system (in light of the above) we can expect the following:

1. The probable unpalatability of Launceston's drinking water ... do we want to depend on bottled water like Germany, South Korea, Turkey?
2. Probable water rationing to the populace of Launceston and environs
3. Siltation of the Tamar and consequences on tourism

**The above and other effects on ordinary people do NOT take into account the effect of the proposed pulp mill. The above considerations concern deleterious effects on water catchment ABOVE the Trevallyn Dam. Damage to the upper and middle catchments of NE rivers, including the South Esk, have and will continue to happen. Add to this the effect of the Pulp Mill in taking 8.54 billion litres three times a year from the Trevallyn Dam and the result is a disastrous situation for the populace of Launceston and environs and an unfair financial advantage to shareholders, employees, related businesses and their employees ... at the expense of ordinary people.**

**Once more, we have an example of the rich getting richer at the expense of ordinary people. This is NOT fair.**

To conclude, take a trip with us in part of the North eastern quadrant of Tasmania. Start with us on our property overlooking the Tamar. We have taken this trip scores and scores of times as we have lived and worked in this area for almost four decades.

From Launceston to Lilydale things appear to be much as they were a generation ago until you look a bit more carefully. What is significant is the lack of small farms and dairy herds. Factually, there appear to be none left; the area has become a bedroom community for Launceston. That is no different from many metropolitan areas in the world. Look more carefully and you will see the tops of plantations and numerous logging roads spearing into the forest. Compared to forty years ago the logging trucks are vastly more numerous and have tripled in size.

It is not until we leave the Lilydale village that the change becomes more dramatic. Again, serious farming has almost disappeared and given way to small numbers of cattle. All the old milking sheds have either been torn down or used as storage. This is clear evidence of shrinking rural population.

Looking across the mountains to the West, the native forests are now only partially extant. A high percentage of visual pleasantness has been replaced with plantations. If you are not looking deeply you might not even notice.

Take a short side trip to the Retreat area behind Lebrina and you come full face with a vast area of pine plantations. You will be fortunate not to get lost in the myriad of plantation roads. Most farms are gone and have been replaced by a monoculture of blue gums and pine. The population of the area no longer supports churches, shops, post offices and other rural services. Most local post offices have been 'unified' with larger centres, e.g. Pipers River. In a word, in the viable community of Lebrina, the school, church, shop and service station are no longer extant, while post office services are almost non-existent.

Continue on the very twisted and narrow highway to Nabowla. If you were a visitor from another country you would be convinced you were experiencing a third world pocket. You would not be. The farms, again, are almost all gone and great potato fields of yesterday are covered with plantations. A quaint experience is to see new houses being closed in and over-shadowed by recently planted monocultures. In Melbourne it is against the law for large sky scrapers to blot out the sun as they wish. On the road out of Lebrina there are homes that will have virtually no sun in the winter and little in the summer. Cause: tall plantations ... and this is not against the law.

Between the Pipers River Road and Nabowla one will see more evidence of the clearfelling of old growth forests in preparation for plantations. A drive up the Wyena Valley will reveal the virtual disappearance of native forest. The Valley is the site of a former farm that was abandoned because of poisoned water. The poisoning was caused by forest run off in preparation for another plantation.

Travel on to Nabowla and turn off towards Mt. Arthur and environs. Again, you will see a town that has now almost died. We saw no obvious farm in a once prosperous mixed dairy and wood getting/milling community. The church is gone. The large shop and post office is history and about 15 percent of the houses stand empty... if they have not already been torn down. The population in the area is fast approaching zero. For the most part, the native forest has been replaced with plantations.

We emphasise that what might appear to be good industrial practice has been paid for with the death of communities, services and farms. Add to this the near absence of native animals and birds: a Silent Spring almost exists on our own doorstep.

Travel on to Scottsdale and count the 'for sale' signs. An important contributor to the near-demise of this formerly lovely village is the abandonment of regional farms in favour of monocultural plantations. This has led to the closing of services and businesses and thus a declining population. What we can say NOW is that this once

vital village is almost certainly 'on the way out' as a viable farm/produce community. Instead, Scottsdale appears very much like a tired Appalachian coal town. Drive out of town and the symbol of Forestry Tasmania would be almost humorous if it was not so stark: The head quarters of the State Forestry industry resembles a leaning stump. Admirers say it is 'modern'. We say it is too modern as the building symbolizes the unchecked spread of monoculture in the form of plantations.

The trip over the Sidling now faces the visitor. The nearby gullies and valleys – well within sight of the road -- could be called 'North East Tasmania's Picture of the Future'. Plantations, newly planted or about to be harvested, stretch to the horizon. On the flats towards Launceston are the social bones of dozens of farms that have been or are being converted to plantations.

In short; THERE IS NO REASON FOR ANY TOURIST TO TAKE THE TASMAN HIGHWAY IF PLEASANT SURROUNDINGS ARE WANTED. WE WOULD SAY THAT TOURISM POSSIBILITIES IN THE AREA HAVE BEEN RUINED.

Of course, the wet water shed which empties into the St. Patrick's River and others, is slowly diminishing. Ask the few farmers left. They may not have the scientific answers but they will tell you simply that, "There is not as much water as before." Dr. Leaman's report verify's this.

## CONCLUSION

We have sought, in this submission, to mix scientific observations (without statistics as there are plenty of those) with our own experiences gathered over two generations in travelling the world.

While we admit a bias against the pulp mill's erection and, likewise, a bias on behalf of calling a stop to further plantations in Tasmania, we have sought to be truthful in all aspects.

Our contention is that the erection of a pulp mill will amplify the sorry picture we have presented above. The problem we see can be reduced to one question: **What sort of island/state do we wish to leave to posterity?**

Signed:

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D.H. "Buck" Emberg

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B. Joan Emberg