

Submission to the RPDC for The proposed pulp mill at Longreach.

Dave Groves

Observations

I have been speaking to many people about this proposed pulp mill since it was first announced to the Tasmanian public.

I have followed with interest the “show” that has alienated parts of the community and divided the state.

The few people I have spoken to that actually think this pulp mill is a good idea are vested interests with no long term vision, but are simply looking to make money from this proposal.

Many have given up on trying to have any input to the process.

Many are selling their homes in anticipation of what is seen as the inevitable. People are depressed and deeply concerned with what lays ahead.

My submission below is more a short story than any specific reference to the proponents IIS.

I don't have broadband, I don't have \$70 to pay for a pile of paper half a metre high and if the proponent was so keen for input from the public, they could have made and posted their DVD for about a dollar per household. Small change I would have thought.

Prelude

The proposed pulp mill in my opinion is a furphy. It is a white elephant of epic proportions.

To conform to the world wide overuse of cellulose pulp on a grand scale in this overpopulated world is pure folly.

We as a state, a nation and as a thinking species should be actively seeking alternatives, not supporting the blinkered view that is the status quo.

As we embark on a journey that sees most people relying on computers, it seems a big step backwards to be in the push for more paper products.

For example forward thinker “Volvo” I am told will not pay a bill unless it is in electronic format.

This particular proposal relies on trashing millions of tonnes of native forest for the life of the project, sold to the proponent at rock bottom prices by the state, the people.

It relies on using technology that will produce organochlorines, suspended solids, unknown chemical cocktails, billions of litres of effluent and consume billions of litres of perfect fresh quality drinking water.

It must be noted that during this whole process, there has not been any talk of any negative consequences of this proposal by the proponent. Only glowing reports have been given to the community.

The process

To begin with let's look at the process.

The government appointed, "independent" RPDC was tasked with the job of analysing the presented IIS and putting it up for public comment etc.

The first round of submissions went fairly well I thought. Everything was referenced and there was feedback taken on board.

The second round was a shemozzle.

The order was gone from the submission and there were "inadvertent omissions", delays in sending drafts to community members and no response to questions asked.

Many community submissions had their concerns ignored.

The third round is now.

It is an abomination.

It is why I am writing this letter.

Two months to troll through 7500 pages if you want to buy them from Gunns at \$70 per copy, download 320mb of files or wander into Gunns HQ for your free DVD copy.

You have just eight weeks or so to place your submission.

How is this true community consultation?

Has the proponent ever organised public meetings to "workshop" this juggernaut?

None I have heard of.

I live near this proposed 90Ha "footprint" and I have never been asked my opinion, invited to a proponent sponsored community forum or heard about anyone who has.

Despite repeated attempts over the last year or more from organised community groups to address their concerns, the proponent has ignored the public.

The RPDC, by its own actions seems complicit in this sorry process.

To the wider community, this project is seen as a “done deal”. It seems the RPDC will green light this project; as is usually the case probably around the holiday season when all are busy enjoying a rest and pulp mills and the calamity they bring are far from the front of the communities’ mind.

The project

The guidelines signed off by the Federal Minister Senator Ian Campbell are all that matter in this process.

Guidelines for a Kraft Bleached Eucalypt pulp mill in Tasmania by their own admission allow massive amounts of toxic and offensive substances to be released into the environment.

The addition of “pine” by the proponent to the mill as a “feedstock” is not covered in Senator Ian Campbell’s’ guidelines, so the proponent I suspect can make their own guidelines up in this regard. This is a major omission and quite a blunder, but very helpful for the proponent.

The proponent has chosen an ECF water guzzler as the “world’s best practice” solution, which is a blatant misnomer. The term refers only to world’s best practice relating to economic outcomes, not environmental, social or otherwise.

In our world today, what is our most cherished possession?
It is not the new car; the two storey house....it is our health.
It is something we all strive for. Around the world people are begging for good health.

What do we do in Tasmania? We have set up rules for the proponent to build a second rate pulp mill. By the guidelines’ own admission and tied to the Air Quality Act 2004, chemicals otherwise constrained by any other industry are allowed to be sprayed over Tasmania’s inhabitants from Tasmania’s proposed tallest smoke stack.

Why should our leaders even consider second best?

Millions of taxpayers’ hard earned dollars have been squandered on a simplistic project of no vision and no direction.

See trees. Cut down. Put in chipper. Get water. Make pulp. Dump waste. Sell pulp.

Let me talk about a Tasmanian icon, our beloved forests.
Since the aboriginal was eliminated from Tasmania the white man has sought to conquer the Tasmanian wilderness for personal gain.
If any inkling of an aversion to “see it, take it” is detected by those who have harvested millions of dollars from doing just that, then you are branded “not one of us” and are sentenced to the outer.

These forests are our national treasure, a rare place of biodiversity, of life and contain benefits to man still unknown.

To trash these forests and replace them with stringline rows of exotic monoculture will be the demise of this state on many levels and an irreplaceable loss to planet earth if allowed to proceed.

The proposed mill is set to use outdated technology, to guzzle billions of litres annually of perfect fresh life giving water, mix it with countless chemicals and dump it as a single use commodity into one of the cleanest oceans in the world only kilometres from one of the world's most treasured diving locations- Low Head.

In Queensland they are voting (regardless of outcome) on if they will be drinking their "wastewater", yet here in Tasmania we are actively promoting "wasting water".

This is really an act of unbridled ignorance and shows disdain for our planet and all the inhabitants.

It is a continuation of the "see it, take" principle that the current mindset relies on so heavily.

The site for this project is in a valley subject to a well known atmospheric inversion layer that traps particulate matter near ground level. Launceston at the head of this valley can be at times one of the most polluted places in the world.

Why would anyone want to add to this pollution?

The last pulp mill proposal was scrapped from this area for that very reason.

Propaganda and the community

For some time the constant barrage of propaganda has rained down on the Tasmania community, part funded by the people of Tasmania through our State and Federal representatives.

It is truly amazing that a private venture is openly and blatantly supported with the money of the people.

Slick advertising, flowery speeches, pretty balloons and glossy brochures have seduced many and enraged many more.

The reality

It doesn't matter how much spin is put on this proposal, no one has, or will, give a cast iron guarantee that when built this mill won't smell and the environment will not be impacted.

The guidelines back this summation with the allowances for emissions.

The solution

This is the easy bit; it is where the fun and excitement begins.

Firstly, scrap this project.

Restructure is next. Latham was going to throw \$800 million to do just that.

An opportunity lost, but now we must just make the best of a lost deal.

What would be good would be to unite the community, to find common ground.

Engage community, seek input and act on positive ideas that will grow our state spiritually, culturally and financially.

Training and retraining are critical. Giving community self worth and independence through enterprise will help mend division and ensure a solid foundation for the future.

Not huge industrial projects, but small close knit businesses that rely on community networking, multi tasking, supportive coaching and counselling and a visionary leadership displaying empathy to all community members.

That is the broad theme, but on a local level, this may involve re-opening small town sawmills for example-not to make massive shareholder profits, but to supply local and perhaps international niche markets.

To value add by training the community in horticulture/silviculture, selective harvesting, fine furniture crafting, design, marketing, business acumen, exports, construction trades etc.

It may involve local produce, farmers working as a team to grow crops for local folk, export markets and tourists.

There are many opportunities here and I don't mean growing zillions of hectares of potatoes at 22 cents a kilo for American fast food chains.

Tourism and eco friendly development is a niche market in a world that has become so bland.

Tasmania's natural beauty is its prime asset. It is not a mine to wantonly pillage.

I can see only huge and boundless opportunities in Tasmania for its inhabitants, but we are at a dangerous and irreversible crossroads that may see us take the road most travelled and become just another small fish swimming in an ocean of sharks.

If true community vision and compassion to all is on the road less travelled and we become aware of the fragility of our world, then this project will be placed in the museum of disasters for all to see what could have been if community parity had not prevailed.

Summary

This is only a brief account and I could have easily written pages with details, dates, facts and figures, but I don't see any practical purpose in that.

I would urge all to consider the true implications of such a proposal, mindful of the propaganda machine.

I bear no grudge to the proponent, in fact I am sorry for the position they have worked themselves into, caught between a tree and a hard place, with this mill seen as the companies' only way out.

Perhaps they could change direction, embrace some of the previously mentioned ideas; regain community spirit-not with money, but with innovation compassion and empathy toward all.

I am sorry for the contractors who are also in this hard place and the ancillary businesses that have grown up around the reliance on a single low grade product in a competitive world market.

Diversification and multi tasking, multi skilling provide some answers, but I see the diversification into "glut" markets and being reliant on tax minimisation schemes as a tunnel visioned approach and not one of long term fruitfulness.

For those who are locked in to these "grab it and run" enterprises, I wish them well. I hope they can be helped from these enticements.

To persevere with this archaic proposal will be a multi faceted tragedy like Tasmania has never seen before.

Hoping that sanity, reason, compassion for the future and happiness for all prevail.

Dave (Groves)