

seems to appeal to Canadians since donations to the Greenpeace charity had fallen by 15 per cent in 1997, the last year of published financial records. Furthermore, many politicians who initially welcomed environmental sentiments have become inured to the scaremongering and have decided not to oppose the Reform Party's anti-Greenpeace stand.

There is plenty of 'clear blue water' between Canada and Europe, however. Greenpeace's European operations are far wealthier and receive the blessing of most of Europe's left-wing governments. Greenpeace has mounted its most successful campaigns in Europe, where politicians abhor confrontation with pressure groups and try to appease them as much as possible. French attitudes have softened since 1985, when their secret service blew up the Greenpeace ship *Rainbow Warrior* in Auckland Harbour. To be fair, European politicians are not given much support by business, which is becoming increasingly defensive, or the media, which thrive on scare stories.

Such official deference—the assumption that Greenpeace is always on the side of angels—looks increasingly out of touch. The recent Greenpeace campaigns against PVC plasticizers and dioxins in Belgian chickens did a disservice to the public in obscuring the scientific evidence and fomenting the kind of panic that harms the public good and hurts consumers in the long run, since it unnecessarily raises producer costs. It was hard to find a single news story that mentioned the concentration of the alleged contamination—a fundamental scientific point, if the allegations of a threat to human health were to have any validity. In fact, dioxin and other organochlorine compounds may cause cancer when fed to laboratory rats in massive concentrations, but have no observable effect on humans at the actual levels found.

Perhaps we will have to wait for Greenpeace-inspired environmental regulations to cause even greater European unemployment and unrest before our politicians follow the Canadian government's example. Environmental multinationals such as Greenpeace should be free to pursue their agenda in democratic society—but it's time governments stopped giving this particular lobby preferential treatment.

NOTE

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Forestry: Beyond One-Liners

WILSON TUCKEY

WHEN politicians choose populism over good policy, they are rightly criticized. When they support good policy over populism they are accused of ignoring the 'will of the people'. This is the dilemma surrounding forest issues.

Forests and the products they provide are one of the few renewable resources that are also recyclable and biodegradable, posing no environmental threat in that process. World demand is increasing and the science of forest management has the history of many millennia to support its practices.

To set the scene, consider the following. Of all the wood consumed in the world:

- 54 per cent is consumed in cooking and heating fires;
- 28 per cent goes to saw mills; and
- 13 per cent to pulp and paper production.

Australians consume 20 million cubic metres per annum of forest products. We import 7.3 million cubic metres of that demand. Our major forest product exports are unprocessed wood because we have been unable to provide investors with the resource security necessary to develop processing facilities in our own country. The net dollar cost to Australia is around \$1.5 billion per annum when measured as a trade deficit.

That 7.3 million cubic metres of finished forest products represents approximately 20 million cubic metres of trees from other nations' forests.

Australians consume 175 kg per capita per annum of paper products, with 55 kg of that total represented by quality papers such as photocopying paper. 270 million Americans use 350 kg of paper per capita, per annum. The 1.3 billion Chinese in the People's Republic of China use 30 kg per capita per annum. Historical data show that consumption of forest prod-

ucts increases proportionately with the growth of per capita income.

In a recent ABARE report, *Forest Plantations on Cleared Agricultural Land in Australia*, some further significant figures were presented:

- based on studies of long-term demand and supply of wood, the average global consumption of wood, excluding fuel wood, will increase at about 1-2 per cent per annum over the coming decades;
- consumption is projected to increase from 1.7 billion cubic metres in 1995 to 2.3 billion cubic metres by 2045;
- the use of pulpwood is expected to increase by 90 per cent between 1995 and 2045 to 1.33 billion cubic metres; and
- engineered products, such as wood-based panels and glue-laminated boards and beams, are being substituted for solid wood products. World production of wood-based panels rose by 80 per cent over the decade to 1996-97 while production of solid wood products declined.

Clearly, people prefer wood for construction and decorative reasons. In the USA, the DIY hardware warehouse chain Home Depot achieves 15 per cent of its annual US\$30 billion turnover from timber products.

Australia has the third highest amount of forest per capita in the world—so we should be able to supply our own needs, provide sustainable value-added products for export and take some pressure off those forests in the world which are subject to threat.

Forests in Australia are ancient, the trees therein are not. A typical tall eucalypt will enter senescence at age 250 and will probably die completely by age 300, although, of course, there are particular trees which live longer.

The Australian eucalypt was not originally the dominant species in our ancient forest but has developed in an

environment of major disturbance, including relatively recent (in historical terms) Aboriginal burning. This history of development of eucalypts means that we can, and must, manage them with flexible and adaptive arrangements to conserve them properly. This includes reservation of some areas and active management and harvesting of others.

Europeans and other wood-using communities in both the Northern and Southern Hemispheres have developed techniques of tree harvesting to maintain a healthy forest while supplying society's needs. The evidence of their success is to be found around the world where such practices have been refined over thousands of years and healthy productive forests continue to exist. A striking example in Australia is most of the forests bordering the Pacific Highway from Sydney to well past Coffs Harbour. These are largely public forests managed for production and conservation over the past hundred or so years, seen by millions each year as they drive past.

The forested areas of the Earth have been reduced. This is the result of land clearing for urban and agricultural activities. Production forestry does not result in the reduction of the forest estate. In fact, the National Forest Inventory shows us that in Australia the area of forest is increasing. We have more forest now than we had a decade ago and we will have more forest in 10 years than we have now, even with a production forestry regime.

The fact that seems to escape many people is that a forest is a good place to grow a tree—and if cut down, they do grow back, though not if they are covered by concrete or asphalt.

Converting forest and trees to the products we humans require can be wasteful. We require rectangular shapes but trees persist in growing round and not necessarily straight. Trees become hosts to insects and fungi which rot their insides and they crack with old age. All this creates saw mill residues and forest rejects.

Past practice was to burn it until the world discovered that eucalypt fibre was the best for quality paper manufacture. Technology also delivered manufactured wood products using residues and waste. Suddenly we had an economic use for such waste called 'woodchips' for further processing.

THE VALUES OF FORESTS

Australia's forest products industry employs some 84,000 people and although, like all other industries, it has suffered job cuts arising from technology and mechanization, its contribution to employment in regional Australia is significant.

Contrary to popular claims, small to medium size sawmillers and contractors provide much of that vital regional employment. Big business is also involved in forestry, but increasingly in the plantations area.

In summary, Australian forests have been shaped by a high level of human intervention and prosper in that situation provided they are allowed to regrow. Their products are in increasing demand and those who harvest and process their products in Australia do so to world standards of

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efficiency and sustainable practices, receiving practically no trade or tariff assistance.

To ensure that this industry and its valuable resource were properly administered, the then Federal Labor Government in 1992 produced a comprehensive policy that was subsequently endorsed by all State and Territory governments and successive governments of both persuasions.

It is called the National Forest Policy Statement (NFPS) and one of the initiatives under that Statement is to conduct Comprehensive Regional Assessments leading to the development of Regional Forest Agreements. This RFA process has received \$200 million of Federal funding and substantial matching contributions from the States.

Of the Commonwealth funding, \$100 million was allocated to scientific research and a process of publi-

cizing and consulting with people in the respective regions. In anticipation that the RFA outcomes could affect harvesting levels, \$100 million was set aside to assist the industry to develop and adjust—this included the provision of compensation elements focused on business exit and worker assistance.

What does this RFA process do? It requires government action—through the formal Regional Forest Agreements signed between individual States and the Commonwealth—to provide for:

- a comprehensive, adequate and representative reserve system;
- an internationally competitive timber industry; and
- ecologically-sustainable forest management across the whole of the forest estate—including production areas.

The Agreements are developed following a rigorous scientific analysis of the environmental, heritage, social and economic values of each region. In terms of environmental protection, scientific advice was commissioned and considered resulting in a set of nationally agreed reserve criteria known as the JANIS criteria.

These criteria define the requirements for a comprehensive, adequate and representative reserve system for Australia. Their purpose is to provide an objective basis for ensuring the conservation of biological diversity and other values within the reserve system. These criteria include objectives to achieve reservation of 60 per cent of existing old growth forest and 15 per cent of the pre-1750 complete forest biodiversity.

The 15 per cent of pre-1750 biodiversity far exceeds the international level of 10 per cent of *remaining* forest established by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and recognized by international conservation groups. That is, we have set ourselves and achieved a far harder target than that advocated by the green movement for all countries in the world.

Over the past three years, the Howard Government has delivered on the RFA process and is on track to finish RFAs for all major forest regions in Australia by the end of this year. Already six RFAs have been completed resulting in:

- a reserve system of some 5.4 million hectares across the 6 regions, equivalent to around a third of the whole geographic area of those regions; and ▶

- initial investment proposals of around \$100 million by private-sector businesses built on the certainty provided under the RFAs and potential industry development assistance.

These are tremendous outcomes. They deserve acknowledgment and recognition.

I ask myself the question why good bipartisan policy—well-backed by research and internationally acknowledged for its environmental credentials, delivering increased forest reserves, jobs, economic benefits and future potential—is still regularly attacked as meeting none of the above?

How could this be so, particularly in my home State of WA, which alone has failed to stick with the outcomes of its RFA?

The reason for this is twofold. In WA, there was a political situation where the Opposition in State Parliament abandoned its own policy stance in order to oppose outright the RFA. This has not happened in any other State to date.

The RFA was also opposed from within the Court Government with the West Australian Nationals publicly calling for changes to the RFA after its signing. So at the political level, the RFA in WA was undermined internally.

The politicians decided to respond to the will of the people. The people were influenced by a clever publicity campaign. As a result, Premier Court became the first example of a living heart donor. I have circulated articles on how the WA media were convinced to sell a package that totally lacked substance and which has resulted in considerable and unnecessary human misery—at least in so far as one RFA is concerned.

Retired Editor-in-Chief of *The West Australian* newspaper Bob Cronin, in his contribution in *The Australian* on 12 August 1999, presented his analysis of the forest debate by claiming that the opponents of the NFPS simply ran a campaign based on ‘one-liners’ and conflict. This, Cronin argued, is a most attractive scenario to modern-day journalism. He infers that green activists were at great pains not to confuse journalists with extensive detail or facts. Cronin said that the profession in WA bought the pitch and communicated the story.

The ‘one-liners’ included such claims as the RFA process was ‘fundamentally flawed’ recited on 3 Septem-

ber on 4QR by the new Democrat Senator Greig: a classic example of saying nothing but delivering a powerful message.¹

For television, it’s the last tree in sight falling majestically into an area of devastation to the whine of the chain saw.

For print and radio, how often does the statement, ‘we have too much salinity already’ go unchallenged when made in the context of the forest debate? When there is no salinity in our production forest nor any potential where regeneration occurs. How often does the statement ‘Australia has already had 126 fauna species become extinct’ go unchallenged when no extinctions have been caused by, or within, production forestry? The fox and the cat are the predators, not the chainsaw.

Kangaroos happily inhabit golf courses but apparently not a regrowth or clear felled forest

We hear that ‘birds and animals will not return to forest regrowth’. I live in the biggest clear fell in WA: it’s called the Perth metropolitan area. My block has two large regrowth Eucalypts that play host to a large variety of birds. Kangaroos happily inhabit golf courses but apparently not a regrowth or clear felled forest.

The most powerful myth is that the Australian tall forest is disappearing, whereas it is in fact expanding.

The last one-liner is allegations of secrecy. The RFA process is one of the most open and consultative processes conducted by governments where an enormous amount of material associated with the RFA process and the final RFA documents and maps are publicly available on the Internet and through the post. They are also consistent with each other in relation to the NFPS.

There is, however, a great challenge for all communication professionals to reflect on and to face. If you content yourself with the option of treating populist one-liners as gospel without adequate research and/or journalistic rigour, then the result will be economic and social misery for a large group of defenceless people whose only ‘sin’ is to work in a renewable industry which harvests trees—and then regrows them.

I make no apology for standing up for these industries and the communities that support them—particularly given the conflict and anguish that they have had to endure. The RFA agreements should be backed by Commonwealth and State legislation—such as Tasmania’s existing legislation and the Commonwealth RFA Bill passed by the House of Representatives. While the RFAs are about providing certainty to those involved in native forest businesses, this government is also delivering additional resources through plantations and farm forestry.

CONCLUSION

The forest products industry in Australia provides products in demand which range from disposable nappies to fine furniture. It uses a renewable resource and both the expertise and the political will exist to ensure that it will continue to operate in a sustainable fashion. It is actually increasing forest biomass whilst providing both economic and social benefits for present and future generations.

It offers opportunities of job growth and it is time that we stopped responding to slick unsubstantiated one-liners and started giving credit to the scientists who do understand their trade and advise governments with integrity.

To finish on a one-liner: ‘Forestry is the only resource sector where with good management we can have our own cake and eat it too!’

NOTE

- 1 In a different but contemporary debate regarding genetically-modified organisms, the parallel is ‘*Frankenstein Food*’.

The Hon. Wilson Tuckey MP is Commonwealth Minister for Forests and Conservation. This is an edited version of a speech he gave at the National Press Club on 16 September 1999.

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