A FUTURE VISION
FOR TASMANIA'S FORESTS

THE TREE PROJECTS

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Executive Summary

As native forest logging is being phased out in some of the mainland states across Australia, there is increasing pressure for Tasmania to follow suit. Continuing down the path of business as usual is dangerous for both the climate and biodiversity. It's time to move to a more sustainable and well managed future for our forests.

This report outlines the science surrounding the main reasons for protecting Tasmania's forests and shows a clear and sensible way forward. It outlines a way of managing our forests to create the best outcomes for the climate, biodiversity and regional communities.

Tasmania, like the rest of Australia, faces some big challenges in the near future. Of these, the climate and biodiversity crises are two major issues that we need to address. Furthermore, we need to help manage the impacts of climate change and the fire threat that faces Tasmanians, especially those in regional communities.

The world is dragging its feet on climate action. Real climate progress is being delayed by the carbon offset market, which has been proven to be ineffective at tackling climate change. Most worryingly, the vast majority of offsets are misleading and organisations are claiming credits for climate benefits that would have happened anyway. There are similar integrity issues with biodiversity offsets.

The authors and associated organisations recognise Tasmania's Aboriginal (Palawa) communities as the Traditional Owners and custodians of all Country in Tasmania. We pay our respect to Elders past and present and acknowledge that this land was never ceded. We support efforts to progress recognition of the distinct rights of Indigenous peoples as well as reconciliation, land justice and equality.

For all these reasons, offsets are not the answer for forest protection. Moreover, Forestry Tasmania (trading as Sustainable Timber Tasmania) has proven time and again that it cannot be trusted to act with integrity. There is a high chance that Forestry Tasmania will claim credits for land within their management area that they never intend to log, thereby taking zero action to reduce their emissions.

We need immediate action to address the climate and biodiversity crises. The best way forward is to immediately end native forest logging. With indigenous consultation and guidance, the Commonwealth Government could provide funding for the management and restoration of Tasmania's native forests, creating new jobs in forest communities. The current subsidies provided to the native forestry would be sufficient to drive investment in real, clean, green jobs.

Time is running out for action on climate change and biodiversity loss. We need to protect our forests now in order to take part in collective global action to reduce emissions and protect biodiversity. Ending native forest logging and protecting our forests for biodiversity and climate conservation is the best future for our forests.

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WHY FORESTS NEED PROTECTING

Carbon Storage

Native forests represent important stores of carbon. This carbon has accumulated while the forest grows over decades and centuries, and once logged, it quickly returns to the atmosphere.

Native forest logging is the highest emitting sector in Tasmania. It emits approximately 4.65 million tonnes of carbon per year, which is the equivalent annual emissions as 1.1 million cars.[1]

Very little of the forest's carbon is captured in wood products. Only 5% of the forest carbon is turned into wood products used in buildings and furniture.[1] The reality of native forest logging in Tasmania is that most of the forest ends up as woodchips and waste, releasing huge quantities of carbon into the atmosphere.

Native forests and other biodiverse natural ecosystems are more resilient carbon stores than degraded forests or planted trees. Protecting Tasmania's native forests is a low-cost, immediate and effective way to reduce emissions.

Biodiversity

Tasmania's forests are home to many of Tasmania's iconic species. They provide habitat for numerous birds and mammals, as well as over 1000 species of plants and countless numbers of insects.[2]

Many of Tasmania's threatened species live in forests, including Tasmanian devils, wedge-tailed eagles and masked owls. The main decline of some species, such as the swift parrot, is directly linked to the logging of their habitat. This critically endangered species is set to be extinct by 2030.[3]

We need to protect Tasmania's forests now to ensure our iconic species have the best chance of survival. Protecting these species' habitats is the best way we can help our native species thrive.

Fire

Under a changing climate, we face an increased risk of severe bushfires. This is not only a threat to our wildlife and environment, but it's also a threat to our communities. We need to start planning now and taking steps to mitigate the risk of extreme bushfires.

There is overwhelming scientific evidence that shows that native forest logging increases the risk of bushfires. Logging native forests dramatically changes their structure, making forests more vulnerable to bushfires.[4]

As the impacts of climate change intensify, we need to be doing whatever we can to keep our communities safe. Ending native forest logging will help reduce the fire risk in regional communities.

THE TASMANIAN FOREST INDUSTRY

Economics

Tasmania's state-owned logging agency Forestry Tasmania (trading as Sustainable Timber Tasmania) loses tens of millions of dollars each year. In fact, the agency has lost a total of $1.3 billion over a 20-year period from 1997-2017. Federal and State Governments have provided substantial subsidies to the forestry industry to ensure its ongoing survival, with almost $1 billion of grants over the last few decades.[5]

While Forestry Tasmania has claimed to make a profit in recent years, independent analysis shows that government grants counted as income exceed the reported profits. Without these grants, and other accounting tricks, Forestry Tasmania runs at a loss. Additionally, Forestry Tasmania has not included the

substantial costs of replanting when determining the expected net proceeds which form the value of the forest estate.[6] This has seen Forestry Tasmania to record an overinflated balance sheet, while in reality it is still losing tens of millions of dollars each year.

Jobs

Native forest logging in Tasmania employs just 0.4% of the Tasmanian workforce, which equates to only 1,100 jobs.[7] This compares starkly to other sectors, such as the tourism industry which employs 21,000 Tasmanians.[8]

The importance of jobs in forestry has been overstated by Tasmanian politicians for decades. A poll undertaken by the Australia Institute in 2012 found that Tasmanians believed that native forest logging employed 24% of the Tasmanian workforce.[9] This polling shows that the perception of the importance of native forest logging to the workforce is far greater than the reality.

Wood Supply

Forestry Tasmania has a legislated logging quota, where it has to supply 137,000 cubic metres of sawlogs each year. This quota is far beyond what is sustainable, and Tasmania is rapidly running out of timber supply from native forests. As a result, old- growth and high conservation value forests are being logged to meet this quota.

The TFA Reserves, areas that were proposed for protection under the Tasmanian Forest Agreement, may soon be accessed to meet this unsustainable quota. These forests consist of 356,000 hectares of high conservation value forests which were specifically chosen for protection due to their important biodiversity values.

These forests mostly represent mature and old-growth forests, which means that they are important stores of carbon. Mature forests store significantly more carbon than younger forests and are more resistant to disturbances such as fire.

THE OFFSET SCAM

Carbon Offsets

Carbon offsetting involves polluters buying carbon credits to compensate for emitting carbon into the atmosphere. Carbon credits are created from activities that store, reduce or avoid greenhouse gas emissions. In the case of native forests, credits would be generated by preventing emissions from avoiding logging.

Using this method of offsetting does not reduce emissions. It is maintaining the status quo by moving emissions from one sector to another. In order to combat climate change we need to be making drastic reductions over all sectors, not just reducing emissions in one sector and pretending it applies to another. In fact, unlimited use of offsets could even increase emissions, if coal and gas companies "offset" emissions and ramp up exports.[10]

Carbon offsets are essentially 'greenwashing' as polluting industries can have the appearance of being environmentally friendly while they carry on with business as usual. It is extremely likely that the purchasers of carbon offsets will be fossil fuel companies, the main contributors to climate change. By purchasing offsets, these companies are able to avoid reducing their emissions.

Climate scientists have warned that relying on offsets delays much needed action on reducing emissions. Relying on carbon offsetting could allow up to 1.4°C extra warming to occur.[11]

Burning fossil fuels releases geological carbon from what is essentially a permanent carbon store. However, the biological carbon in forests is very different because carbon may be retained for a shorter duration and be impacted by disturbances. These disturbances such as fire, disease, flood and droughts will become increasingly common with climate change.[10]

Biodiversity Offsets

Biodiversity offsets is where one natural area is protected to compensate for the impact to biodiversity elsewhere. For instance, if there is unavoidable impact to nature from a development, then another area is protected to compensate for the impact.

The problem is that by protecting one area in place of destroying another, there is an overall reduction in the amount of original habitat. This means offsets don't result in overall improvements to nature, but rather maintain existing declines.[12] It is essentially an accounting trick.

Biodiversity offsets do not address one of the main causes of biodiversity loss, which is habitat destruction. Biodiversity offsets have been described as "a licence to trash nature".[13]

Lack of Integrity

There have been major concerns about the integrity of carbon offset schemes. New research has found that out of the top 50 global carbon offset organisations, not a single one was deemed to have credible offsets.[14]

Many of the current offsets being used in Australia are not reliable and have been shown to have failed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This is because 80% of the carbon credits approved under the scheme do not represent real or new cuts in greenhouse gas emissions.[15]

TFA RESERVES

The TFA reserves are areas that were set aside for reservation under the Tasmanian Forest Agreement. When the Liberal Government tore up the agreement in 2014, these reserves were earmarked for future use by the forestry industry. These high conservation value forests are problematic as retailers have no interest in wood sourced from high-biodiversity forests due to the conflict it encounters.[16]

The Tasmanian Government has expressed interest in 2023 to 'open up' the TFA Reserves for logging. Given that none of the industry wants this 'high-conflict' wood, conservation groups are concerned that Forestry Tasmania purely want to gain access to the TFA Reserves so they can be placed on the carbon offset market. This would not achieve any reductions in emissions, as it is highly unlikely that the TFA Reserves would be logged anyway.

Misleading offsets often claim for climate benefits that would have happened anyway. For instance, landholders have been given credits for not clearing land that they were never going to clear in the first place.

Biodiversity offsets have similar issues around integrity. Around 60% of Australian biodiversity offsets have been found to be ineffective.[17] Projects are often not monitored or maintained, and their effectiveness is often not evaluated.[18] Some developments have included offsets that were never delivered, or already protected sites were used as an offset.[19]

Exploitation in Tasmania

There is a high chance that carbon offsets for Tasmania will be exploited. There have been many examples in Australia already where landholders are gaining carbon credits for not logging forests that they never intended to log in the first place. There is a real chance that this could happen here in Tasmania.

Forestry Tasmania has been proven to be an unreliable landholder, and for the last few years has been misleading the public by providing incorrect information in its financial statements.[6] It has also falsely represented how much area would be protected from logging under Swift Parrot management plans.[3]

There is a high likelihood that Forestry Tasmania will claim misleading carbon offsets, while keeping logging at the same rate as before. This means that It will not be making any cuts to its emissions, and income from selling the credits will only prolong the native forest logging industry.

A BETTER WAY FORWARD

Protecting Our Forests

Protecting our native forests has the best outcomes for the climate, biodiversity and our communities. We should not be relying on market based solutions. Delivering real emissions reductions requires governments to use regulations and spending. Instead, the Commonwealth Government should be paying Tasmania to end native forest logging and protect its forests.

The Commonwealth Government could then use the emissions reductions generated by the forests to meet Australia's international emission reduction targets. Averaged over the last 20 years, the Tasmanian native forestry industry has received $50 million a year in Government subsidies and grants. This money could be used to help manage previous logging areas for biodiversity and carbon conservation, creating jobs in forest communities.

Jobs in Regional Communities

Money provided to Tasmania from the Commonwealth Government could be used to create regional jobs in forest conservation and fire management. Teams of workers could help restore degraded forest areas and help manage threats such as weeds and feral species. Other jobs could be available in fire management, as bushfires will become more common as climate change intensifies.

Tourism and investing in visitor services could bring far more sustainable employment and a wider range of job opportunities for regional communities. This would ensure more equitable employment opportunities for women, young people and migrant communities.

Indigenous Custodianship

It is critical that the future management of Tasmania's forests has significant input from traditional owners. As the first and true custodians of Tasmania's forests and wild places, it is important that their voices are heard when it comes to forest management. Proper and thorough consultation with Aboriginal groups is essential before any solid recommendations can be made, but future management options could include land hand-backs, the formation of Indigenous Protected Areas, or joint management schemes with the added benefit of Indigenous employment.

Better Management

A new or alternative government organisation, such as the National Parks and Wildlife Service, will need to manage the future forest reserve. Forestry Tasmania has a terrible track record when it comes to land management and a new management structure is needed, with a strong focus and vision on biodiversity and climate change.

This new management structure will have strong consultation with indigenous groups and will be funded by the money provided by the Commonwealth Government. This organisation would implement appropriate reserve statuses, identify important research and remediation areas and manage a workforce to undertake management plans. This organisation would have biodiversity and climate mitigation as its key outcome and would be based on leading evidence based science.

Supporting Alternative Economies

Other alternative economies can exist to help support regional economies. The Maydena and Derby mountain bike parks are prime examples of how investment by the Government can reshape rural communities.

Tasmania has globally unique forests, but there is a significant lack of infrastructure for people to visit these places. Low impact trails and walking tracks aimed at drawing local and domestic visitors to regional areas would help boost local economies. Recent reports have shown that for a modest investment, eight tall tree visitor sites could be implemented in southern Tasmania and could generate $20.2 million for the regional communities and create 163 jobs.[20]

Plantations Can Meet Our Timber Needs

Close to 90% of Australia's wood now comes from plantations. With the proper investment, plantations could meet all of Australia's wood needs.[21] Not only do plantations produce 14 times more usable wood per hectare than native forests, they also produce 60% less emissions when logged.[22]

More investment in plantations is needed so we can ensure wood supply into the future. Farm forestry, where small scale plantations are added into the agricultural landscape, is the best way forward. This sustainable method provides additional income for farmers and increases biodiversity and production on farms.[22]

Around 85% of current eucalypt plantations are used for paper and cardboard and are harvested on short 10 to 20-year rotations. If these plantations were grown for 25 years or longer and managed appropriately, they could produce sawn timber suitable for building. Allowing eucalypt plantations to grow longer would not only allow them to absorb more carbon, but would yield a more valuable product that would store carbon long-term.[23]

CONCLUSION

The rest of Australia is moving towards protecting native forests. By 2024 we will see an end to native forest logging in Western Australia and Victoria. Due to continued economic loss, lack of community support and the future impacts of climate change, it is inevitable that native forest logging will come to an end in Tasmania in the coming years. We need to start thinking about what the future of our forests looks like.

Offsets will not save us. They have been proven to lack integrity and only set to delay action on climate change. They are also ineffective for preventing biodiversity loss. Forestry Tasmania cannot be trusted to act ethically, as it has a track record for incorrectly reporting data and cannot be trusted to manage a credible offset system.

We cannot afford to waste any more time on false solutions. Avoiding the worst of climate change means stopping the extraction and burning of fossil fuels and protecting our natural environment. In Tasmania, the biggest action we can take on climate change is to end native forest logging.

On an economic level, Tasmania needs to seriously address the economic burden that native forest logging has on taxpayers. Through protecting our native forests and by providing alternative employment in forest protection, fire management and tourism, we have an opportunity to reshape regional economies. Let's not miss out on an opportunity to shape a more sustainable economic future for forest communities.

The debate around Tasmania's forests has divided the state for decades. It has been used as a wedge to polarise the community. The political dialogue around forests has been based on its inflated importance to the economy. We now have an opportunity to re-write this history and rapidly reshape the way we value forests. The way forward is to prioritise our forests for their priceless biodiversity and climate benefits.

Time is running out to take action on the climate and biodiversity crises. Let's take action that will positively benefit Tasmania and our collective future.

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