

ALTERNATIVES TO CLEARFELLING OLD GROWTH FORESTS IN TASMANIA

Submission by The Institute of Foresters of Australia (IFA)

14 May 2004

Background to the Institute of Foresters of Australia

The Institute of Foresters of Australia is the professional association of trained foresters in Australia and has Divisions in all States and the ACT. Across Australia there are 1230 members. The membership represents all segments of the forestry profession, including public and private practitioners engaged in the management of large areas of forested lands. Members have a strong presence within the native forests and tree plantation industries, and within the ecological science community. The nature of members' work ranges across timber production, nature conservation, land management, research, administration and education.

The Institute is:

- an advocate for better forest and woodland management in Australia
- an advocate for high professional standards in forestry
- an advocate for active management of our forests and woodlands for all values
- a focus for professional development activities, both formal and informal
- a source of information about developments in the profession and in forestry generally within Australia and our region of the world.

Members are ideally placed to provide independent advice to government on appropriate standards of land management practice aimed at both professional forestry development and the achievement of acceptable environmental outcomes. This advice is founded on a sound appreciation of the ecology of forests, being active in policy development and is based on many years of field experience in forestry in Australia and internationally.

This submission is based on the professional knowledge of foresters with field, research, education, policy development and management experience in native forest silviculture and forest ecology.

This submission highlights the Institute's collective view on the various aspects of these documents but it must be noted that there is also a broad range of views across the Institute's membership.

Introduction

These documents are some of the most important native forest silviculture papers to be released since the completion of the silvicultural systems project in the East Gippsland and the Central Highlands of Victoria (Campbell 1997).

The Institute recognises the imperative to explore alternatives to clearfell silviculture in Tasmania's old growth forests. It also recognises the extensive CAR reserve system within Tasmania's public and private forests.

The Institute commends the Tasmanian government for its effort to establish both a comprehensive, adequate and representative reserve system and promote an internationally competitive timber industry. The Institute fully supports the Regional Forest Agreement process. It also commends the Tasmanian government, and particularly Forestry Tasmania, for the development of these documents.



The papers are clearly written, well set out and contain a wealth of pertinent material. However, significant further information is required before fundamental changes could be made to forest management practices in these forests. There must be a clear case that the benefits outweigh the costs. The Institute would like to see all benefits and costs clearly established, considering the economic, social and environmental consequences of any options.

The strongest message the Institute can present is support for the work that has been done in identifying alternatives to clearfell silviculture in old growth forests and that no single alternative will be appropriate across all forest types. This is already reflected in the silvicultural practices applied across the State which include single tree and gap selection, seed tree, shelterwood and clearfelling systems. The Institute recognises that each practice has its own advantages and disadvantages but whatever system is applied must take into account the silvicultural requirements of the forest types, site-specific conditions, safety for forest workers, consideration of economics and an understanding of the silvicultural impact on future forest productivity (Florence 1996).

The Institute believes that perverse outcomes would result from a simplistic decision. It notes the transition to the harvesting of regrowth forests is already underway and is implicit within the RFA. Any of the alternatives to clearfelling is likely to require an increase in the area to be harvested to access the same timber volume and in the medium term, the establishment of a larger area of plantation. The probable consequence that land for plantations would come from existing native forest would be seen by many to be an undesirable outcome.

The Institute concludes that in considering possible alternatives to current practice, the goal must be to aim for better forest management, not to react to the distractions of a constructed media campaign.

The Institute of Foresters of Australia submits the following notes:

Public acceptance of alternatives:

- a) Future access to the timber products being produced from public old growth forests relies upon public acceptance of their management and silviculture.

The requirement for an independent review:

- b) For reason of clarity of independence, submissions should be considered by an independent review group outside of Forestry Tasmania that includes a silviculturalist, ecologist, economist and management forester to determine an appropriate way of implementing a policy of cessation of clearfelling in old growth forests by 2010.
- c) The Institute could recommend nationally respected persons with qualifications that fit these criteria.
- d) The Institute congratulates Forestry Tasmania for using external reviewers for each of the papers put forward.

Silvicultural system application:

- e) No single alternative silvicultural system is appropriate across all forest types.
- f) Clearfell, burn and sow will still be required on some sites - the alternatives are not always suitable, especially on steep slopes.
- g) Clearfell, burn and sow is an internationally recognised silvicultural system highly appropriate for some wet forest types. It has been developed over many decades to ensure there is adequate regeneration and minimal off-site impacts.
- h) Alternatives put forward by Forestry Tasmania are generally sound in their assessment of the various impacts on the economics, regeneration, forest management, safety, and productivity issues of the management of these forests.
- i) There is a continuing requirement for research into silvicultural alternatives and an ongoing research, monitoring and review program on the viability and potential implementation of the alternatives.
- j) There will be an ongoing monitoring requirement on the success of any alternatives applied at both the on-site and landscape level.
- k) Silvicultural systems applied must be consistent with broader landscape management objectives.
- l) The impacts of clearfelling can be ameliorated by modification of coupe size and shape and through appropriate spatial and temporal dispersal. The Institute notes that small, well dispersed coupes incur higher planning and management costs but are more likely to be socially and environmentally acceptable. The Institute strongly advocates continuing improvement in the planning of clearfell coupes through the Tasmanian Forest Practices Code.

Reservation requirements for old growth forests:

- m) Outcomes should be consistent with the requirements of the Regional Forest Agreement.
- n) Where RFA targets for old growth forest have not been met, efforts should be directed towards identifying the most important of these forests for inclusion into the reserve system, as formal or informal reserves, to make up these targets.

Implications for Forestry Tasmania and the broader industry

- o) Old growth forests are currently essential for maintaining the current timber harvest volumes in Tasmania.
- p) There needs to be recognition that if current clearfelling application is curtailed, Forestry Tasmania may not be able to provide the same income returns to the Tasmanian people. Because costs will be significantly increased to supply the equivalent volume of timber, a royalty increase option could be explored for old growth forest timbers.
- q) Increased royalties for old growth timber would possibly encourage industry to maximise recovery of higher value products.
- r) The additional complexity to implement alternatives to current silviculture should not be underestimated. Forestry Tasmania would need to employ additional staff (silviculturalists, field supervisors, forest managers).

Products produced from old growth forests:

- s) Old growth forests produce unique products that are very difficult or impossible to obtain in regrowth forests under current rotation regimes. These include large dimension timber (with its inherent stability) and specialty timbers. It is therefore reasonable that the forest management should also be unique including the targeting of specific products from these forests that cannot be obtained from other forests.
- t) The Institute would consider support for encouraging specific targets for production of products unique to old growth forests and maximising recovery of specialty timbers and products unavailable from regrowth forests. This is important to demonstrate to the community that these forests are being managed for more than just common timber products. Forestry Tasmania and the industry should be able to demonstrate the recovery rates of higher value products from these forests.

Wood supply alternatives:

- u) The Institute would not favour alternatives that require a further substantial increase in clearing of native forest to establish plantations. The principles of the Australian Forestry Standard should be strictly adhered to with respect to this matter.
- v) The Institute would not support outcomes that increase importation of forest products as substitutes for what was previously harvested in Tasmania's forests. This applies at a state level and National level.
- w) Recognising that generally the most efficient method to grow timber volume is under an even aged silviculture regime, the Institute believes there would be a reduction in the long-term sustainable yield associated with using alternatives to clearfell silviculture. This needs to be recognised and managed.
- x) There is a requirement for accurate identification of the costs and benefits of the various silvicultural alternatives both on and off-site. This would include roading, planning, broader fire protection, visual aesthetics and on ground supervision.

Other considerations:

- y) The Institute does not favour outcomes that will further endanger the lives of forest workers and forest managers in harvesting and regeneration of these forests.

Governments should not make decisions on alternatives for social or political expediency without obtaining specific advice from forestry professionals as to the potential consequences and practicalities to implement alternatives. For example, the decision to cease harvesting in old growth forests in Western Australia has had a



dramatic impact on the forest industry and communities reliant on these forests. The 60 percent reduction in forest harvesting may have improved the reservation status of certain West Australian forest ecosystems but has been at the expense of rural communities and the broader state economy. The money spent on industry restructure could be used for other more important conservation outcomes.

- z) The reduction in harvesting of Australia's forests can lead to the direct substitute of these forest products with imports. For example, the reduction in harvest of Jarrah in Western Australia is likely to increase import of substitute timber from Southeast Asia.
- aa) There is potential justification for a trade-off approach that recognises clearfelling does impact upon some forest values and that an "environmental levy" is placed upon old growth forests under a clearfelling regime. The amount of this levy could be the equivalent of the harvesting and management cost differential between clearfell silviculture and alternatives and could be used for environmental restoration work in other parts of Tasmania.

Supporting references:

Campbell, RG (compiler) (1997) evaluation and development sustainable silvicultural systems for mountain ash forests. Discussion paper. The value adding and silvicultural systems report. VSP technical report No 28. Forest Service, Department Of Natural Resources Environment, Melbourne. July 1997.

Florence, R. (1996) ecology and silviculture of eucalyptus. CSIRO, Melbourne.

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