

The Institute of Foresters of Australia

ABN 48 083 197 586



29 May 2012

The Hon. Julia Gillard, MP
Prime Minister of Australia
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister

The Institute of Foresters of Australia (IFA) acknowledges the release of reports by the Independent Verification Group (IVG) appointed to advise the Tasmanian Forests Intergovernmental Agreement process (IGA).

The IFA is not surprised that the areas of forest identified by ENGOs and assessed by the IVG have conservation values as Tasmania's forest practices are designed to conserve such values. These finding also reflect current management objectives which are independently certified and audited, overseen by the Forest Practices Authority and have been acclaimed by international experts, including those of Yale University and UNESCO.

The IFA notes that Clause 2 of the IVG's Terms of Reference (ToR) required "*an independent and transparent verification process to assess and verify stakeholder claims*". The IFA considers the IVG reports require peer review to meet Clause 2 requirements, and this has not been done.

Consequently, and in absence of such a review, the IFA has prepared a brief critique of selective IVG's reports to test whether they are factual, science-based, and draw justifiable conclusions. This critique does not assess all reports and is not comprehensive.

While limited in scope, this critique highlights that many of the assumptions and methodologies in the reports are questionable and/or limited and narrow in their approach, and supports the need for a comprehensive, independent and holistic review. A copy of the critique is at www.forestry.org.au.

Consequently, the IFA has serious misgivings on the way these reports have been developed, presented and promoted and cannot support the IVG or their findings or the process that lead to them.

The IFA is also disappointed that the reports:

- fail to consider that a change to public land tenure will not of itself maintain, expand or enhance forest conservation values and to promote such an approach is simplistic and at odds with contemporary forest science;
- were undertaken without sufficient consultation or engagement with key stakeholders in contravention of Clause 4 of the ToR which required the IVG to "*Put in place appropriate arrangements for ongoing consultation*" with groups that included the IFA as noted in Attachment A of the ToR. Further, the IFA does not consider that superficial discussions held with members constitutes meaningful consultation, and strongly rejects any assertions we have been consulted; and

- authors were constrained in what they could achieve by narrow ToR, the short time provided, limitations on ability to ‘field proof’ assumptions, and a reliance on known and often incomplete data. Given these constraints, it is apparent that additional work is required to provide credibility and integrity of the IGA process and perceptions of bias.

Despite our grave concerns about the IVG process, the IFA remains hopeful that the IGA may yet deliver a meaningful and lasting resolution to the conflict over Tasmania’s forests that would allow for the continuation of a dynamic native hardwood industry which complements the plantation sector rather than being replaced by it.

As such, the IFA remains willing to actively and constructively contribute to the IGA process on the basis that:

- all Tasmania's public forests are assessed for significant conservation value against a nationally agreed set of criteria that incorporates social and economic principles. Included in this should be a retrospective examination of up to 200-years of forest management in current multi-use forests and the implications for existing conservation values.
- where multi-use forests are found to contain significant conservation values then management plans should consider retaining commercial activities where they do not conflict or could enhance those values.
- a comprehensive evaluation be undertaken of any proposed change in public land tenure including the ongoing funding of National Parks, fire-fighting capability, maintenance of access roads and associated infrastructure, and permitted uses (eg. beekeeping, horse riding, deer hunting, off road vehicles etc.).
- a study on the national and international implications of the dramatic reduction in the harvest of timber from Tasmania (and Australia's) native forests be undertaken with a view to answering questions about consequences for global carbon storage, illegal logging in developing countries, tropical deforestation, and trade leakage.

In conclusion, the IFA is frustrated and disappointed that despite its members collectively possessing over 20,000 years experience in forest management, including over 2,500 years of direct experience in Tasmania, their engagement by the Australian and Tasmanian Governments to participate in this process has been little more than tokenistic.

It is inconceivable to our members that a government would fail to actively engage with a professional organisation where policy changes will directly impact on members of that profession. Yet it seems that with respect to forest management, individuals with limited or no direct experience have more influence on forest policy determinations than tertiary-trained and professional foresters.

The IFA hopes that this letter and your response will change this perception and reassure our members that your government is taking our concerns seriously

Yours faithfully

Adrian O’Loughlin
(A/g Chief Executive Officer)