



Media enquiries

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MILL APPROVED YET CHIEF SCIENTIST'S REPORT CONFIRMS FATE OF COAST UNCERTAIN

Bondi Beach, NSW – The Federal Environment Minister's approval of Gunns' Tamar Valley pulp mill has not resolved uncertainties about the fate of toxic effluent in Bass Strait, the effect on the coastal environment, marine industries and the potential health impact on recreational users of the coast, Surfrider Foundation Australia (SFA) Northern Tasmania said today at a "Pulp Mill Public Meeting" held at Bondi Pavilion.

SFA Northern Tasmania science advisor, Dr Thomas Moore, said the scientific report commissioned by Minister Turnbull confirms what SFA, as well as government and independent scientific consultants, have been saying since September 2006 regarding the inadequate and unrealistic hydrodynamic modelling undertaken by Gunns.

"Not surprisingly, the Peacock Panel report confirms that Gunns has not done its 'hydrodynamic homework', has not provided the necessary baseline data and analysis that would enable the Federal Minister to make a fully informed decision on the pulp mill. Even more alarming is that the Chief Scientist's report clearly states that the Federal decision ignores independent advice regarding the threat of pollution on Tasmania's beaches and in state waters.

"It is difficult to comprehend how the Minister could approve the Tamar Valley mill without a precise scientific understanding of the effects of dumping over 23 billion litres of industrial effluent per year along our wild, pristine coastline.

"Minister Turnbull has granted Gunns' approval to commence construction before the necessary hydrodynamic and sediment modelling work has been done. The proponent has been given a passing grade, yet they haven't finished their homework. This is unacceptable to all Australians who value the marine environment and their right to clean beaches and coastal waters," Dr Moore said.

The Peacock Panel found that, "construction and operation of the proposed mill poses some residual risks and uncertainties" and that, "aspects of the submitted preparatory biological and hydrodynamic assessments for mill establishment and operation were inadequate."

According to the report, the missing modelling is, "essential to reliably define the extent of mixing and dispersion of dissolved and particulate contaminants, and any likely depositional zones in sediments where contaminants, in particular dioxins and furans, might accumulate to levels of concern . . ."

Dr. Moore said, "Malcolm Turnbull has told Australians that construction of Gunns pulp mill can go ahead despite this uncertainty and risk because he has imposed so-called 'safeguards'. It is difficult to see how this could be the case.

"If the required modelling subsequently shows the mill will have unacceptable environmental outcomes - especially on our beaches and in coastal waters - it beggars belief that any Federal politician would, or even could, shut down a newly built \$1.7 billion mill with the fate of a vast corporation at stake. Malcolm Turnbull is playing a dangerous game with Tasmania's coastal environment," Dr Moore said.

This week, Australia's Chief Scientist, Dr Jim Peacock, publicly confirmed that if Gunns chooses to begin construction before they finish the required modelling they do so at their hazard and that "any major concern . . . could negate the go-ahead."

Dr. Moore said, "The prudent course of action available to the Minister was to simply require the work demanded by Peacock be completed and assessed before approval. Why did we receive this ham-fisted approach instead?

"No credible person can claim 'science alone' justifies approval for this mill, when the science clearly has not yet been completed," Dr Moore said. /ENDS

BACKGROUND

SFA is not opposed to downstream processing of forest products in Tasmania but maintains we must be absolutely sure that any development is benign to the environment, other industries, coastal amenities, and indeed our fellow Australians.

The proposed Gunns Ltd pulp mill in the Tamar Valley will discharge over 23 GL (“Giga-litres” = billion litres) of process effluent per annum into Bass Strait, approximately 2.7 km off Five Mile Bluff.¹ According to Gunns’ own documents the discharged mill effluent will likely contain over 160 “chemicals of interest” including chloroacetic acids, resin acids, ammonia, metals, phenolics, benzene, hydrocarbons, chlorinated hydrocarbons, aldehydes, ketones, and highly toxic persistent organic pollutants such as dioxin.²

Hydrodynamic modeling, the numerical representation of the ocean and its fluid processes, wholly underpins our understanding of the possible fate of such pollutants and their potential impacts on the marine ecosystem, marine industries, coastal amenity, and human health.

Since November 2005 SFA Northern Tasmania has taken an active and constructive role on this issue, participating in good faith with both State and Federal assessments. In September 2006 SFA Northern Tasmania delivered a 48 page submission to the Resource Planning and Development Commission (RPDC) which, among other significant concerns, concluded that the Gunns Ltd. hydrodynamic modelling was inadequate. The SFA RPDC submission made a number of recommendations for required analyses and revised modelling that are echoed in the Peacock Panel report.

On April 18th, 2007 SFA Northern Tasmania wrote to the Minister for the Environment, Malcolm Turnbull, and his Department regarding the deficiencies in Gunns Ltd analyses and reports. SFA urged Minister Turnbull to therefore reject Gunns Ltd’s call for an EPBC assessment based solely on “desktop” analysis and “preliminary information”. SFA Northern Tasmania urged Minister Turnbull, in the strongest terms possible, to choose an EPBC assessment process that would provide an appropriate level of transparency and scrutiny through public hearings, ensure the protection of the marine environment, and restore public confidence. This red flag from SFA was ignored by Minister Turnbull.

ABOUT THE SURFRIDER FOUNDATION: A HISTORY OF TACKLING POLLUTING PULP MILLS

Surfrider is a non-profit organisation dedicated to the protection and enjoyment of Australia's oceans, waves and beaches for all people through Conservation, Advocacy, Research and Education (CARE). We have 29 branches nationwide, international affiliates in the USA, Japan, Brazil and Europe, and over 100,000 members worldwide.

Surfrider advocates the sustainable management and use of the coastal zone, including coastal river catchments and offshore activities. Our opportunities to enjoy the coast: its clean water, its biodiversity and its spectacular landforms, are influenced by the actions of individuals, the aspirations of business, and the policies of all levels of government. Surfrider aims to increase awareness of many issues impacting on our enjoyment of the coast, and to ensure that our children have similar opportunities to enjoy it as we have today.

Surfrider is part of a larger, international Pacific Rim Pulp Mill Coalition, advocating responsible and effective coastal environmental management standards from pulp mill operators.

In 1991 Surfrider Foundation USA won the second largest Clean Water Act suit in United States history against two pulp mills in Humboldt County, California. As a result of the legal action the Louisiana Pacific’s Samoa pulp mill was converted to a closed-cycle, totally chlorine-free (TCF) process.

For further information visit the SFA website at: <http://www.surfrider.org.au/>

¹ Gunns Ltd Draft IIS (V18 A63), Hydrodynamic Modelling, GHD, July 2006 (incorrectly labeled March 2006)

² Gunns Ltd Draft IIS (V10 A22), Human Health Risk Assessment - Bell Bay Pulp Mill Effluent, Toxikos, July 2006