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M E D I A R E L E A S E

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Time for forest industries to fight back

Australia's forest industries are under siege from government mismanagement as well as devious anti-native timber campaigns, Tasmanian Liberal Senator Richard Colbeck told Federal Parliament today.

"Australia's forest industries are unfairly under threat right now, partly from saboteur groups like Get-Up and Markets for Change but also from Labor-Greens governments that are continually mismanaging critical issues, like the Tasmanian forestry Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA)," Senator Colbeck said.

"The IGA process has become a farce, with the latest twist being a Federal Forestry Minister trying to withhold information because he doesn't like the result of the independent advice that was sought.

"The forest industries are sick of the unhelpful government meddling, and they are sick of the continuous ill-informed anti-forestry campaigns - especially those unfairly targeting native forestry activities.

"Forest scientists tell us that native forest management regimes over long-term rotations are better than plantation-based regimes for the types of timber that we want for fine furniture, craft wood and boat building industries.

"Forest scientists tell us that native forest is better for diversity, better for water quality and better for timber quality. It is also better for the landscape values desired both by our local communities and our tourism industries.

"There are thousands of forestry workers and supporter across Australia and it is time their voice was heard in Canberra again.

"I have just launched an online petition for this very purpose. In a matter of days nearly 500 people have added their name.

"It is time for the forestry industry to fight back, to protect its reputation and stand up for its future," Senator Colbeck said.

Link to Senator Colbeck's petition -

http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/supporting_australian_forest_industries/

Attached: Hansard (unproofed) of Senator Colbeck's speech to the Senate today.

Senator COLBECK (Tasmania) (13:02): I rise today to speak about the complete and utter mismanagement of the forest sector nationally by this government here in Canberra and about the complete shambles which is the management of the Tasmanian native forest sector. A couple of weeks ago, I put through this place a notice of motion requesting documentation around the rescheduling of coupes within a 430,000-hectare area in Tasmania which is claimed to be of high conservation value and which is the subject of negotiations between the Commonwealth and the state of Tasmania for the intergovernmental agreement. I did that knowing that such documentation, up to a certain date, existed.

My motion included a call for the initial advice presented on 13 October 2011 to the government and signatories and for further information requested by the signatories in relation to that initial report. The response from the minister is:

I refer to the Senate order of 3 November 2011 for the production of documents concerning advice being prepared under the Tasmanian Forest Intergovernmental Agreement. The community-led process that is preparing the document sought has not yet finalised its advice. I will comply with this order as soon as practicable once final advice has been provided to the government.

I know that one piece of advice has been finalised, because I actually have a copy of it. I was asking the government to formally release that. They have been trying to keep that document secret. In fact they have asked the committee to go back and reconsider the advice they have given—as part of the negotiation of the intergovernmental agreement—on whether coupes within the 430,000 hectares claimed to be a high-value conservation area were to be logged and on the rescheduling of those coupes. They requested the committee to do that not once but twice. In its initial advice, the group commissioned to provide the advice said that 25 coupes should be logged within the timeframe of the assessment—between the signing of the intergovernmental agreement and the end of this year. The reschedulers concluded that 25 coupes were required to be logged in that timeframe.

The government asked them to reconsider that advice. They have done that and been back—and the government have actually gone back and said, 'Can you reconsider it again?'. I do not know at what point in time you actually accept the answer of the experts you have asked to manage this process, but it is obvious that the government does not like the advice it is being given, because it is an inconvenient truth for the government. It compromises the chair of the assessment process they have put in place, Jonathan West, a former national director of the Wilderness Society, who told the government, in the last couple of days before finalising the intergovernmental agreement, that there would be no coupes required and who has effectively taken the advice of the environmental groups party to this process that there should be no logging within that 430,000-hectare area.

The concern that I have is that this whole process has effectively been turned over to the NGOs to manage. Four of the six people doing the assessment on that area are former associates of the Wilderness Society or have close with links to the Wilderness Society. I do not think the industry would have a concern about fair process if there were reasonable representation. But it is quite clear that the representation is not reasonable. The government is turning what has been a shambles from the start into an even worse state of affairs.

The dishonesty which surrounds this process is quite profound. The environmental groups in Tasmania claim that within five years the industry should move out of native forest and into a plantation resource—

that is the demand, that is the claim. The real problem is that there is no plantation resource available for the native forest sector to transition to in Tasmania. It will take at least 35 to 40 years to grow that resource.

Dr Phil Pullinger, head of Environment Tasmania, was on ABC radio saying, 'But there are 300,000 hectares of plantations in Tasmania, more than enough for the industry to transition to.' What he quite dishonestly does not tell the Tasmanian people is that those trees have been planted and are managed for a specific purpose. It is not possible just to turn the tap on and off and change midstream. Of the 300,000 hectares, two-thirds are privately owned. So Dr Pullinger is basically telling the Tasmanian community that we can just decide for private land owners and private owners of trees what we can do with their property. That is what he is doing. He neglects to say that of the 300,000 hectares, 77,000 hectares are planted to pine, not to Tasmania's minor species, and pine is not a suitable timber or fine furniture, craft and boat building. Dr Pullinger does not tell the Tasmanian people that 232,000 hectares of hardwood within the 309,000 hectares has been planted, managed and designed for the paper market. When you do the figures, you see that about 100,000 hectares of additional plantation will be required to be specifically planted if Tasmania is to transition from the native forest regime to a plantation based regime.

It will take 35 to 40 years to establish that transition. There is only one place they can be planted and that is on agriculture land. We—environmental groups and any of the rest of us—do not want to convert any more of our native forests to plantations. One of the mistakes we have made in Tasmania is to convert native forests to plantations, using our agriculture land. There are about 670,000 hectares of that in Tasmania and 100,000 hectares would be required to transition the industry.

So what are we doing? Why would we want to move our forest timbers out of the forests where there are most sustainably managed? All of the science—which, tragically and dishonestly, is ignored by the environmental groups—tells us that a native forest management regime over long-term rotation, is much better than a plantation based regime for the types of timber we want for fine furniture, craft wood and boat building industries. The science is quite clear. Native forest production is better for diversity. It is better for water quality. It is better for timber quality. It is much more sustainable for landscape values for the tourism industry, which relies on those landscapes. It is much better to sustainably manage our native forests over a longer term rotation if we want to have a high-quality, furniture based regime.

Dr Adjani, from the Australian National University, tells us that we have more than a plantation in Australia to transition, but she also does not tell you that it is the timber types that make the difference and that you will not get the high-quality veneers and high-quality craft, furniture and boat building timbers out of plantations. It is simply not possible to do that. Then laid on top of that we have the dishonest campaigns by GetUp! and Markets for Change, who campaign against companies like Harvey Norman who use blackwood harvested in the north-west of Tasmania to make furniture. That area has been logged for over 100 years by families like Britton Brothers, who have sustainably managed and regrown those forests over that period so that there is a sustainable timber supply. If Markets for Change and GetUp! dishonestly target companies like Harvey Norman, who are using sustainable timber—we know it is legally logged, we know it is sustainably sourced—what is the alternative? The alternative is to source timber from South-East Asia where we know that forest practices are not as rigorously imposed as in Australia, where we know there are potential threats to native species—the orangutan, if you like. So we are off-shoring our responsibilities. If we manage our native forests sustainably in this country, as we should, we can play our part in providing a carbon sink. The great fine furniture in this very chamber is a carbon sink—about half of it is carbon. That

carbon is locked there. The environmentalists tell us, 'Don't cut down our forests because they are taking up carbon.' They do not tell you the reality, that it is the growing forests that are taking up carbon.

The old growth forests are a carbon store, that is correct, but they are effectively net emitters—by small amounts because trees plateau in their uptake of carbon as they mature. Environmental groups do not tell you that. They interpret the science which talks about the uptake of carbon, particularly in South-East Asian forests. They say, 'Let us stop cutting down all the trees because that will save the planet.' They do not tell you that it is the regrowth forest in all of those regions which is actually taking up carbon. Standing forests are a store—that is right—but the science also shows that as long as you harvest timber and maintain your regrowth at a sustainable level, the impact on the overall store is minimal and in the longer term you will store more carbon because carbon stored in solid timber is locked there for the life of the products. That is what the science says, which the environment movement are not telling us that. The environment movement are trying to push our native forest sector out of the forests and onto our farmlands and with the broad debate that we have at the moment around food security that is a risk to our food security.

None of them are prepared to talk about that, but they continue with the dishonest campaigns against good companies like Harvey Norman, who have traceability programs in place to know that they are buying furniture that is built from timber that is legally harvested and sustainably managed. They are doing all the things that you would expect a responsible company to do and yet we have these dishonest and negative campaigns that run against our industry.

It just astounds me that we are doing almost the reverse of what is happening in the Northern Hemisphere in relation to our forestry. In the Northern Hemisphere, they are all-encompassing in relation to their native forest regimes. If you were listening to anyone in Australia, you would think the Forest Stewardship Council certification system was designed only for plantation based harvesting. It was actually designed around the management of a native forest regime. The boreal forests in Canada are all harvested under FSC certification and they are all native forests.

The ENGOs in Australia do not tell you that. They do not tell you about the high biomass targets that are being utilised in countries in the Northern Hemisphere. At the same time, because of the ENGOs green ideology, we lock out the utilisation of biomass as a renewable energy source here in Australia. It is just crazy that we would do that. Within our existing harvest, without touching another twig or tree, we could generate 3,000 gigawatts of renewable energy at a life-cycle carbon emission rate four per cent that of coal. Those are the sorts of things that are possible with some sensible policy, and yet this government, dragged along by the Greens, is refusing to go down that track.

A report called *Seeing the forest through the trees* was presented in the House of Representatives today. At first glance—it has been tabled for less than an hour—it has some sensible provisions. It would be nice if the government would listen to its own members who are on this committee. Mr Dick Adams chairs the committee but has been sadly silenced in the destruction of the Tasmanian industry. There are some sensible recommendations in the report that talk about and understand what is needed for the long-term sustainability of this industry, an industry that should be supported and that deserves to have a long-term future if it is managed properly, if the government is prepared to step out from behind the shadow of the environmental groups. (*Time expired*)