



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

PROOF

**QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE:
TAKE NOTE OF ANSWERS**

Tasmanian Pulp Mill

SPEECH

Thursday, 3 March 2011

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker Milne, Sen Christine

Source Senate
Proof Yes
Responder
Question No.

Senator MILNE (Tasmania) (3.32 pm)—I move:

That the Senate take note of the answer given by the Minister representing the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (Senator Conroy) to a question without notice asked by Senator Milne today relating to the proposed pulp mill.

My question to the Minister representing the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, Senator Conroy, related to the Gunns pulp mill in the Tamar Valley in Tasmania. On 5 January 2009 the then Minister for Environment Protection, Heritage and the Arts, Peter Garrett, set 3 March 2011 as the final date for a decision on the three remaining modules of the environmental impact management plans submitted by Gunns for the proposed pulp mill at Bell Bay in Tasmania. And can you believe it? After two years—one day before the minister is due to make his decision—Gunns intervenes and says, ‘Actually, we need more time because we think the conditions should be tougher.’ So the minister takes the company at its word and gives it additional time.

It is unbelievable that the minister would take this company at its word. This company has done nothing but delay, delay, delay every single step of the way, whether it is on assessment or on investment decisions. I do not know how many times they told the stock market they were going to have their joint venture capitalist named and so on and so forth, and it never happened. Now we are at the point where a company which pulled out of the original assessment process, under then Premier Lennon, because it was too rigorous and they could not meet the requirements and which corrupted the whole process has told the minister it wants tougher conditions. Why would anybody believe them?

Furthermore, this company has put forward a proposal for a pulp mill that has had so many variations. One minute it was going to be a plantation based mill using chlorine-free technology. The next minute it was going to have native forests and not be chlorine free. Now it is going to be plantation based and, we are told, elemental chlorine free, which means chlorine dioxide and which means there will be organochlorins in the effluent going into Bass Strait.

What is so disgraceful about what is going on at the moment is that the community has not been allowed to see or comment on Gunns’s modules for hydrodynamic modelling and other data they had to put in for the management plan. The last time the community got an opportunity to comment the result was that Minister Garrett said that Gunns’s information was not sufficient for him to be able to understand the full impacts to Commonwealth waters and that he could not have absolute confidence in the proposed management and response strategies to protect the marine environment. He came to that conclusion because at that point the community had been able to look at Gunns’s information.

The minister still has not made that available to the community. Now that the minister has decided to give Gunns leeway so that it can submit whatever it wants beyond the deadline, the minister must put this information up on the internet for the community to look at. It is simply not good enough to say, ‘We’ve asked the company and they’ll put it up some time.’ Yes, they will—after the decision is taken, after the deadline for the community to be able to look at it and ask, ‘Is this adequate or is it not adequate?’ It is a complete breach of process that we have a proposed facility of this size and magnitude and the potential pollution of Bass Strait and the airshed of the Tamar Valley. We are now seeing so many variations. The company has not been required to go back to day one and put up the final proposal that they want assessed.

This is a corrupted process. It is a corrupted mill. It does not have a social licence to operate and never will have, because the community does not want it there and does not trust this company, having been told so many lies over a long period of time about what this company will do. Initially, the pulp mill taskforce, on which Forestry Tasmania’s Bob Gordon was one of the leading luminaries, said Gunns would have a stack so high it would go above the inversion layer. How ridiculous! That is the kind of misleading information the community has been given.

Minister, if you are going to give Gunns the chance of more time, you should tighten the guidelines to that which they should have been originally and make that information available to the community now so that it can assess it and give you feedback before you make your final decision. It is critical that that

happen. Instead, the community is being shut out and Gunns is being given the benefit of the doubt again, consistent with its delay, delay, delay—undermining the conditions and pulling out of the environment assessment processes. This mill will not proceed, regardless of what the minister is saying about this. In particular, right now he needs to go out there and give the community information it needs.

Question agreed to.