Tasmanian Conservation Trust
102 Bathurst Street, Hobart
Tasmania 7000 Australia
Phone: (03) 6234 3552
Fax: (03) 6231 2491
tct@southcom.com.au
http://www.tct.org.au
ABN 63 091 237 520

MEDIA RELEASE

25 July 2006

PULP MILL INTEGRATED IMPACT STATEMENT DOES NOT PROTECT SEALS FROM PULP MILL POLLUTION

A major concern about the effluent from Gunns proposed pulp mill is that it will release persistent organochlorine compounds, including dioxins, into Bass Strait. These highly toxic pollutants may contaminate fish and animals that feed on them such as like seals and dolphins.

Contaminated fish may even lead to the accumulation of dioxins in people, a health problem recently highlighted in a story on Sydney commercial fishermen and their families on ABC's 7:30 Report[1,2].

The Gunns Integrated Impact Statement devotes an entire section to the impact of dioxins on the seals at the Tenth Island near the effluent outfall[3]. This section states on more than one occasion that "dioxins are not significantly bioaccumulated or biomagnified by fish or bivalves".

In a review of relevant scientific literature, dioxins and other organochlorines are reported to bioaccumulated in fish and the marine mammals that eat them. The Government report[4] that is a major reference cited in the Gunns IIS clearly states this, and it is difficult to understand why this information was not repeated in the Gunns IIS.

According to the Monitoring Plan[6], a monitoring program that may identify pollution by chlorine compounds, including persistent organic pollutants (such as dioxins) is apparently going "... to be determined in consultation with DPIWE (sic)".

A complete IIS should have this important monitoring program developed to the point where it can be properly assessed.

Dioxins cause a wide spectrum of adverse toxic effects in many vertebrate species. They are particularly potent developmental toxicants at low concentrations and can disrupt the development of the endocrine, reproductive, immune and nervous system of the offspring of fish, birds and mammals when exposed from conception through postnatal or post hatching stages. Reported adverse responses include: acute lethality, reproductive impairment, developmental abnormalities in young, endocrine and immune

dysfunction, neurological dysfunction, wasting syndrome, edema and hemorrhaging[3].

The World Health Organisation states that "long-term, low-level exposure of humans to dioxins and furans may lead to the impairment of the immune system, the impairment of the development of the nervous system, the endocrine system and the reproductive functions. Short-term, high-level exposure may result in skin lesions and altered liver function. Exposure of animals to dioxins has resulted in several types of cancer[5]."

While the Tasmanian Government seems highly enthusiastic about building a pulp mill that will be a source of pollution that will threaten marine mammals, the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Senator Ian Campbell, is keen to protect them. Yesterday (24/7/06), Senator Campbell announced a new Australian Centre for Applied Marine Mammal Science in Hobart at a cost of $2.5 million. This facility aims to boost the conservation of our marine mammals. It is hard to see how the Commonwealth Government can aim to protect Australia's marine mammals on the one hand, while potentially permitting the dumping of toxic pulp mill effluent into Commonwealth waters on the other.

The Tasmanian Government could reassure the public about this important issue if it would announce the introduction of legislation that would stop mill operations if problems were identified.

Further information:
Jon Bryan
Phone: (03) 63265684
jonbryan@southcom.com.au

References
1. ABC's 7:30 Report Thursday 20 July 2006.

2. ABC website (24/7/06): file:///c:/Documents%20and%20Settings/Jon%20Bryan/Desktop/gunns/abc%20730%20report/s1691649.htm).

3. Comment on Bell Bay Effluent and Potential Impact on Nearby Seal Colonies Report V10_A23.pdf available from the Gunns website: http://www.gunnspulpmill.com.au/IIS/default.htm

4. Gatehouse R. 2004 National Dioxins Program, Technical Report No. 11 Ecological Risk Assessment of Dioxins in Australia, Australian Government Report, Department of the Environment and Heritage

5. World Health Organisation website (21/7/06): (http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs281/en/index.html)

6. Monitoring Plan Report V4_part4.pdf available from the Gunns website: http://www.gunnspulpmill.com.au/IIS/default.htm

Seal pups at Tenth Island near
the proposed pulp mill outfall.
Photo © Jon Bryan