

Gunns Proposed Pulp Tamar Pulp Mill and Climate Change

John Biggs

The initiative the Rudd Government has made climate change one of its top priorities, as shown by the immediate signing of the Kyoto Protocol and indeed by commissioning the Garnaut Report itself. After years of denial and distorted priorities a majority of Australians can now take heart.

There is, however, one very serious issue pertaining to climate change where the Government seems to be moving in precisely the wrong direction. I refer to the Gunns Pulp Mill on the River Tamar -- "the wrong mill, in the wrong place at the wrong time" as expert Dr. Warwick Raverty put it as he was forced to resign from Tasmania's RPDC assessment process. The RPDC had found the mill "critically non-compliant" with their guidelines: an environmental and health disaster in the making. So Gunns withdrew from that process, and Premier Lennon obligingly set up a fast-track for approving the mill, in a deeply flawed benefits-only process that excluded a cost-analysis, such as greenhouse effects, and public input.

On the matter of climate change, Gunns, and members of the forestry industry, made the absurd claim that greenhouse emissions will be *lower* once the mill is in production than previously because the carbon in trees would be locked up in woodchips, and all that tanker fuel transporting the chips to Japan and Korea would be saved.

However that may be, that assessment completely ignores the following:

1. Gunns now admits the mill will be fired by forest debris, not by gas or coal or electricity. Forest debris is itself a source of carbon that will pollute.
2. The wood supply for pulping will come from old-growth forests in the North-East of Tasmania – hence Gunns determination to use the Tamar site – which Forestry Tasmania has undertaken to supply at absurdly low costs *for the next twenty years*.
3. One of the major contributors to greenhouse gases is deforestation, as the Garnaut Report says, and here is the largest timber form in Australia, backed by the Tasmanian Government, committed to 20 years more of deforestation of old growth forests in just one area alone of forest operations.
4. After clear-felling, and the logs for pulping removed, the forest floor is then napalmed. Every autumn Tasmanian skies are darkened with huge clouds of smoke from these accelerated burn-offs. And this will continue to happen for another 20 years.
5. It is estimated that huge diesel log trucks will carry the debris and the logs for chilling and pulping every few minutes. The pollution from this alone must be huge.
6. The construction of the mill will itself, in methods and materials used, impacts on greenhouse gases.

In terms of climate change alone the pulp mill will be a major contributor – it has been estimated it will raise Australia's total emissions by 10 per cent. If the Federal Government is serious about climate change it cannot allow this mill to proceed.

Unfortunately, however, all the signs so far are that it will allow the mill to proceed.

Environment Minister Peter Garrett has already approved two steps in the construction of the mill: clearing the site, and allowing in the bulldozers. Every such move makes it all the harder NOT to approve this deeply unpopular and scientifically and politically flawed project, which 90% of those in the Tamar region don't want, and 70-80% of all Tasmanians don't want.

Peter Garrett has said that the mill project "was subject to the preparation and approval of a detailed Environmental Impact Management Plan", but if he later invokes this, it makes it all the easier for Gunns to sue for compensation for doing the work that has already been approved. So far that has not been very much, which makes it all the more important to stop this disastrous contributor to carbon emissions immediately.

Mike Bolan, systems consultant, has written a very important article: "**Tasmania and the Risks to Rudd**" <http://tasmaniantimes.com/index.php?/weblog/article/tasmania-and-the-risks-to-rudd/>

It should be required reading for all members of the Federal Government.

Yours most sincerely,

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