

# Why should You support TCA

It is getting towards the end of my first 12 months as CEO of TCA and I must say that it has been an extremely challenging and rewarding 12 months.

TCA has achieved a good deal over the past months, but there is still a great deal more to do before I believe that TCA will be achieving at its full potential.

I am not aware of any other industry sector in Australia which like our forestry and timber sector has within its own structure a “social chamber” such as TCA represents for our industries and communities.

In this role TCA has a huge and extremely valuable and important role to play for all of its stakeholders.

It is worth taking just a minute to consider who TCA’s stakeholders are? The first question to answer when considering this is what is a TCA stakeholder?

In a recent TCA staff meeting where we went back to fundamentals to ensure that all staff had the same common view of the role of TCA we resolved this question in the following way;

“A TCA stakeholder is any person or organisation who, either by direct or indirect contribution to TCA, membership of TCA, membership of a group TCA seeks to speak on behalf of, or of a group TCA seeks to make representations to, is entitled to have an expectation of TCA at any level”.

Using this definition TCA understands that its stakeholders fall into 5 main groups;

1. The timber communities of Australia on whose behalf TCA seeks to make representations to Governments and industry.
2. The corporate sponsors of TCA who through their support of TCA empower the communities within which they operate.
3. TCA’s grass roots members who voluntarily give their time, energy and passion to support TCA in fulfilling its functions.
4. The Governments at all levels to whom TCA seeks to make representations on behalf of its communities and who rely on TCA’s input in this regard.
5. The TCA staff who have an interest in the ongoing effectiveness of TCA for their employment

Over the 21 years of TCA’s operation the environment within which it functions has changed and it is important for TCA to evolve along with its operating environment if it is to remain an effective “Social Chamber” for the forestry and timber sectors on the behalf of its stakeholders.

Some of the changes that have occurred within TCA’s operating environment over the years include;

1. The emergence of the plantation industry in a number of “hubs” across the country and the need to manage the social impacts in these regions of this activity.

2. The increasing trend towards value adding and secondary and tertiary processing within the native forestry sectors.
3. The increasing importance of private native forestry in the native forest sector.
4. The increasing importance of the native forests sector to provide “value added” products.
5. The acceptance by Government of TCA’s role and the tendency for TCA to be involved in policy decisions early in a proactive role rather than later in a reactive role.
6. The decline of in forest green protests, or at least of TCA aiding their cause through in field confrontation.
7. The emergence of a range of significant whole of industry challenges and opportunities including carbon management, water sharing and fire management.
8. The emergence of new “hubs” of plantation activity in Queensland.

It should not be forgotten that in the early years of TCA existence, then as the Forest Protection Society (FPS), Governments across Australia had little regard for the rights of Australia’s timber communities or of the impacts of their land and resource use decisions on those communities.

In those times TCA had no option than to be the visible voice of opposition to those seeking to influence Government land and resources use decisions in the form of the Greens and the only way for TCA and its supporters to do that was by being conspicuous, who can forget the Parliament House protests of 1989.

More than any other process the Regional Forest Agreement processes of the 1990’s signalled that Governments across Australia had come at least to some degree to adopt the much spoken about but little practiced “triple bottom line” approach to land and resource use decisions.

For the first time on a large scale the Federal and all State Governments in which RFA’s occurred entrenched within the RFA processes the consideration of the social impacts of the RFA outcomes.

For TCA the RFA’s represented the point at which Australia’s timber communities moved from being on the “conspicuous fringe” of the decision making processes to an integral internal part of the decision making process.

Of course TCA retains the capacity, and the will to operate conspicuously in the public forum when required such as at the Tasmanian rallies of recent times.

While the adoption of social considerations in the RFA outcomes was often not what we would have wanted, many subsequent Government land and resource decisions across Australia have paid even less genuine attention to social consideration, often while cynically purporting to do so.

For example in NSW and despite the best efforts of TCA and others recently introduced regulation of Private Native Forestry made absolutely no attempt to consider the social impacts of the regulation despite assurances and commitments given by the responsible Minister who simply claimed to have been overruled by estimates committee when it came to funding the work.

More and more often nowadays this is an example to the battle ground on which TCA operates on behalf of all its stakeholders. These days nearly every Government land and resource use decision will purport to have considered “social” impacts and values, some genuinely do and often TCA has been a part of that process, many do not or only do so inadequately and this is just one of the places where nowadays you will find a TCA state manager agitating on behalf of TCA’s stakeholders.

No other industry association in the sector can nor has the endorsement to fulfil this role as the “social chamber” of the forests and timber sector.

Why then does TCA have this endorsement, because TCA has the grass roots community support through its membership to enable it to legitimately understand their concerns and issues and to represent those on their behalf both to Government and industry as required.

This is why it is critical that if the forestry and timber industry sectors in Australia wish to continue to have within their own structure a “social chamber”, they continue to support and assist TCA to maintain and build its grass roots community membership and support base.

TCA as an organisation and every TCA State Manager is aware of the importance of its activity at the grass roots community level, while some industry associations and many industry participants also appreciate this; it is high time that those who don’t came to do so.

TCA is devoting itself to enhancing through the development of the skills and abilities of the TCA staff their ability to deliver on behalf of TCA’s stakeholders and also to building TCA’s capacity through the increased support of all of those same stakeholders.

Jim Adams

CEO

Timber Communities Australia