

Auspine Tasmania where are we at?

As most people know it has been an unsettling time in the North East of Tassie. The loss of the log resource seemed like it would mean the end of Auspine's operations in the North East, but our community, employees, union and Auspine stood firm and united. I think the plight of the North East as a whole captured the hearts and minds of all Tasmanians. The closer of these 2 mills and loss of 300 jobs would mean the death of our wonderful community. The impact of this closer would then cause another 500 to 800 jobs to be lost out of the community. Closing shops, schools, cuts to our hospital and health services. Auspine is our largest employer, directly contributing \$12 million dollars in wages to our community per year.

Like many others in TCA we felt that we had a strong timber history in our community and that was something to be proud of and worth fighting for. We were offered the potential employment at FEA. 3 main obstacles faced many employees. The first being that if you lived in Scottsdale it takes 50 minutes to get to Bell Bay but in addition to that a lot of the people employed at Auspine lived on the other side of Scottsdale in the smaller towns of Ringarooma, Ledgerwood, Branxholm, Winnaleah and Pioneer and already travel 20 to 50 minutes to Scottsdale. The next obstacle that we faced was that their mill would not be operational for at least 14 months. The question was asked "with no logs our mills would close, so what will we do for the next 12 months for work and money till theirs gets going?" And the final obstacle was that they were only looking to employ 100 people not 300 people which are employed at the 2 Auspine mills in Scottsdale.

With the full support of Auspine and the CFMEU we formed the Community Workers Action Group. Made up of employees from both sites we started to work closely with Auspine, the community, local council, union and politicians state and federal.

Our campaign started "**Our families, Our future, Our forests, Fix It**" followed by "**Save the North East Mills, Save the North East Community**".

We organized a rally in 3 working days, we contacted nearly every business in Scottsdale and surrounding towns and letter dropped nearly the entire North East on foot and by car to let every one know what we were up too. That rally was attended by 800 to 1000 employees, family members, community members and business owners and we proudly announced to the whole of Tasmania that we would not be quite and we were not going away. We invited business owners, politicians, employees and the CFMEU to speak and tell every one what it would mean to them if our mills where to close. In fact many businesses in Scottsdale closed their doors to show their support. In turn we continue to encourage everyone to support our local businesses. Putting our rally into perspective only 7500 thousand people live in the Dorset Municipality so over 10% turned up for

our rally. If was in Launceston that would be the equivalent of 7500 thousand people and Hobart 17500 thousand people. So we made the anti pull mill organized by the Greens in Launceston look pretty average with only 2000 thousand people attending.

We then started to pressure Premier Lennon through the media and in person with our now famous or should I say infamous **“back turning protest”** at the Scottsdale council chambers and boy did we take some criticism for that! We stood in the rain with our kids, at the Launceston Cup and handed out stickers and badges. By the end of the day there weren't too many eskies that went in to the Cup that didn't have a sticker on them saying **“Save the North East Mills, Save North East jobs”** and we where happy to see the next day on the front page of the Examiner our badge being worn by a punter. But the funniest thing of the day was that because our stickers where green a lot of people at first thought we were Greenies and we nearly got kicked out because of that, some fast talking by Scott McLean and all was settled, we set every one straight that asked and our support base grew enormously We had Tim Cox from the ABC morning show on speed dial, he even came to Scottsdale and we had a forum on the radio about our issue. We took every opportunity to get as much media attention as we could. Nearly every shop in Scottsdale had signs in them out about saving our community. We wrote letter after letter arranging meetings with any one whom we thought could help. For us we were fighting for survival. We had to get logs to see us past the 31st of March. If the doors closed there would be no hope left.

After securing a meeting with the Premier we started to feel like we had turned the corner. But the day we where scheduled to meet with him was the day Gunns announced that it had to pull out of the RPDC. With a media and political storm brewing the Premier still meet with us and we appreciated that immensely. He listened to us intently and showed his concern and commitment to the North East and to the Timber Industry as a whole. With his help Auspine secured all timber resource at Strahan and King Island.

Then after some more pressure the Federal Government released a \$6 million dollar package for the Scottsdale Industry and Community Development Fund. This no longer hinged on the closer of our mills.

The ground swell of support from all Tasmanian's is overwhelming. To here people on the radio, to read letters in the newspapers and even ring us personally to support us is amazing. That continued support keeps us going.

So where are we now?

To date we are still in full operation. Auspine has made a commitment to continue its Tasmanian operation. Our future is not as bleak as what it was on the 29th of January. Auspine has secured the Strahan and King Island resource

from the State Government. Has contractual arrangements with Gunns, Norske Skog, Rayonier and some private growers for additional tonnage. We can see the light at the end of the tunnel. But we still have along way to go. We have enough resource to continue at full operations for the next 12 months. Past that date we do have resource secured but not enough to run at full capacity. We need to secure more. And we need it to be sustainable.

So where are we headed now?

Well there have been some very interesting twists to our story in the past weeks. Gunns buying the 25% share of Auspine and offering to buy the other shares is all a bit over our heads. We do welcome the solid investment made by Gunns, it can only make us stronger and to keep operating into the future. That's why we started in the first place. We didn't want to close or be relocated so fingers crossed. While the battle for ownership starts, we need to make sure that we are focused on why we started. We want to work and live in our community well into the distant future.

The signs in the shops of Scottsdale have now changed. This time they raise concern about the exporting of logs. Log export is the next challenge that we face. Where we see our future being taken away from us. Every sawmill that processes pine across this state big or small needs that resource to stay in our state so we can all benefit from its use. It will continue to create employment and futures for our communities. Also the growers of that timber resource must be given an opportunity to achieve an equitable return on their investment so to encourage future investment. A balance must be found to ensure that we all have a bright future.

We will be working hard to stop the Joint Venture (State Government, Rayonier and GMO) owned logs of saw mill quality leaving our state. We have peacefully protested down at the Burnie Wharf and will continue to on daily basis outside Rayonier offices in Launceston till they stop the exporting of saw mill quality logs. We have been there for over 8 weeks now, rain hail or shine. And we are seeking another meeting with the Premier to show him footage of the mountains of pine logs that where being loaded from the Burnie wharf in May for export. We believe there was over 20,000 tonne of saw mill quality logs on that wharf. We're hoping to meet with private growers and country saw millers to see what we need to do to get the balance right. Tassie is a great place so we need to work together to keep it strong.

Export logs = Exporting jobs

Yours truly,

Eva Down on behalf of the Communities Workers Action Group
North East TCA member.