

Speech Notes
Annual Conference
Timber Communities of Australia (Tas Branch)
Launceston, Saturday 4 July 2009

Good morning And thank you for those kind words of introduction.

I am delighted and very honoured to be here with you this morning to be part of this very important conference.

I must begin by acknowledging my Parliamentary colleagues and other distinguished guests who are with us today

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I am sure they join me in recognising the very important contribution to Tasmania's social and economic well-being made by our timber industry and the people who are part of it.

Like so many other primary industry sectors, the timber industry is very much built around communities and these communities are built on the foundation of hardworking families and individuals.

So it is appropriate that this fundamental character of the timber industry is recognised in the name of your organisation, Timber Communities Australia, or TCA as it is more affectionately known.

Many of you here would know that TCA began its life as the Forest Protection Society, to give your industry a voice in the rampant “forest debate” of the 1980s.

While that name was perhaps appropriate for those times, there is no doubt that the name Timber Communities Australia more closely reflects the nature of the industry it represents.

That is because the timber industry, and the “forest debate” that is still with us today, is not just about trees.

It is, more importantly, about people about families and individuals about businesses, large and small about communities.

The real strength of TCA is that it reflects that same essential character, because it too is about people about communities, about families, about individuals and about businesses.

It is also largely about smaller rural and regional communities and the people who are part of them.

However, it is vital that TCA continues to be open to people and communities in our cities and to larger forestry-based companies and organisations.

To a great extent those people and companies are in the engine room where so many decisions about the timber industry are made and where those who oppose it make most of their noise.

Just last weekend, the ABC's *Landline* program, which I am sure many of you watch religiously, carried a story about how the National Farmers Federation is looking to reinvigorate itself.

A crucial part of this process is the broadening of the NFF membership base and in this respect it is catching up with approach that TCA has followed for many years.

The broad community base that underpins TCA is also a key reason for the public profile and credibility the organisation has in the "forest debate".

The TCA provides that independent voice of reason and support for those in our communities who care about all aspects of the future of the timber industry.

As a member of the Tasmanian Parliament I can assure you that the authority and reasonableness of the TCA briefings provided to us from time to time are highly respected and valued by the vast majority of those sitting in the Legislative Council and the House of Assembly.

George Bernard Shaw once said:

“He knows nothing and thinks he knows everything. That points clearly to a political career.”

With all due respect to Mr Shaw, I know from personal experience that it doesn't take long as a Member of Parliament to be brought down to earth and find out how **little** we really do know.

This is why TCA briefings are so important in helping us do our job properly and for the benefit of all Tasmanians.

While on this point, I must acknowledge the great work done for TCA and for Tasmania by Barry Chipman.

For many Tasmanians, Barry is the public face of TCA and he never lets a misrepresentation or untruth about the timber industry go unchallenged.

He is one of those rare individuals who is always extremely busy, yet never misses an opportunity or shirks an issue when it comes to standing up for timber communities.

It has been said that if you give a job to a busy person it is sure to get done and, in Barry's case, that is very true.

It is also true in Northern Tasmania, although this time TCA have given the job to two very busy people who I might add have a fantastic support team of family and friends around them.

Firstly, there is Eva Down, who as you all know is the newly-appointed Northern Tasmanian Co-ordinator for TCA based in Scottsdale.

Eva has hit the ground running and has already made a big impact since taking over the reins from Adrian – to whom we thank very much for his contribution and effort during his time in the role.

The other TCA stalwart is Karen Hall, who to my mind is one of the most amazing workers any community can have.

From my own knowledge and experience, there seems to be nothing that Karen is not prepared to organise and, more importantly, follow through with.

With support of her husband Ken, she carries on that commitment to others even when the going gets tough for her and her family. To Karen and family our thoughts are with you all.

Many of you in your own communities will have an Eva and a Karen, although you would be very lucky indeed to have both.

Regardless, you will know how important it is to TCA groups around our State and across Australia to have the support and enthusiasm of members like these girls

..... members who are passionate about the timber industry and put that passion into practice for the true welfare of their families and their community.

When I was first asked to be with you today, I gave quite a bit of thought to the theme of this conference: *Moving Forward*.

Some people in our communities might say: “And about time at that!!!”

But you and I know that the timber industry has never and will never stand still.

Nor will it attempt to survive or thrive on its past performances.

Everyone associated with the industry knows that it can't afford to do that.

Like all Tasmanians, the people within timber communities want the very best for their families, their industry, their nation and their world.

This commitment is clearly reflected in the TCA Mission Statement, and I quote:

“Our aim is to secure long term access to natural resources to generate employment for regional communities and to ensure our unique Australian forests are scientifically evaluated and sustainably managed for the benefit of future generations and genetic diversity.”

This tells me without doubt that our timber industry is about *Moving Forward*, but moving forward in a responsible and respectful manner!

Having set the direction, the associated challenge is how best to move forward.

Bearing in mind the words I quoted earlier from George Bernard Shaw, I would like to put forward some thoughts about how this can be done and I do so in the form of a challenge to you as individuals and as an organisation.

I challenge you to share a vision for the future of the timber industry in Tasmania and further to take that vision to your network of friends, your extended family, your business associates and make it a topic of discussion around our State.

I acknowledge that a vision which embraces the complexities of an integrated forest industry can be challenging to identify and even more challenging to articulate.

Forestry Tasmania, as a forests manager, has a clear vision which is spelled out on its website:

“Tasmania’s state forests will be a globally trusted source of sustainable timber and other forest products and services for this and future generations.”

The website sets out five charter platforms for sustainably managing the forests over which FT has stewardship:

1. Sustaining bio-diversity and habitat;
2. Sustaining jobs for current and future generations;
3. Sustaining carbon stores, clean air, water and healthy forests;
4. Sustaining community access and heritage; and
5. Sustaining science-based stewardship.

I won’t make judgements about that vision or the charters which underpins it, other than to say I think it’s at least a pretty good start.

Some private forest managers in this room will adopt their own variations to Forestry Tasmania's theme.

Others still may have visions involving processing and marketing.

There will be many variations in approach, but it is my contention that you all should be saying pretty much the same thing.

Again, without professing to know everything, it seems to me that a longer term vision for the industry is not that complex.

After a seemingly endless series of exhaustive, expert and costly inquiries, along with significant financial investment, Tasmania's timber industry now has:

- a statute-bound, multiple-use native forest resource on Crown land;
- an equally significant native forest resource on private land; plus,
- a world-class plantation resource on both public and private land.

To maintain the balance we also have a world class system of parks and reserves that is nationally recognised and independently audited.

I am, and I believe all Australians ought be, proud of these outcomes.

Given the balance between development and conservation, I believe any vision for the future of the timber industry should be built on forest industry participants who:

- obey the law;
- strictly meet the requirements of the Forest Practices Code;
- are independently audited to prove performance; and,
- send every stick of timber coming from our forests and plantations to its highest value end use, whether that is veneer or premium grade board product at one end or firewood at the other.

At the very core of that vision is a total commitment to use every opportunity to add value to timber products in Tasmania.

If the industry can move forward with a vision like this, then individuals will have secure jobs, communities will flourish and our State will have a greater capacity to provide education, health services, law and order, and all the other services Tasmanians need.

The ever-worsening impact of the global financial crisis over the past year or two can make it difficult to move forward with much optimism.

Things have been pretty tough in the timber industry, and again I'm not telling you anything you don't already know and are experiencing.

However, it is important that we not only **move forward** but **look forward**, always remembering that we can't change the past, but can shape the future.

There are so many positive messages out there for us to harness.

Just recently, I received in the mail a DVD titled *Going Bush Series 2*.

It was sent to me by Bob Gordon, Forestry Tasmania's Managing Director. I am sure Bob would have sent everyone here at least one copy. If not, see me at the next break – I'm sure I can arrange it!

This DVD shows the day-to-day activities of our foresters, the science involved in forestry management and how tourism goes hand-in-hand with the work of forestry when our timber resources are managed in a sensitive and sustainable manner.

I know only too well that there are some in our communities who don't support or appreciate those involved in the timber industry, whether it be as a contractor, forester, truck driver or one of the other dozens of forestry-related activities.

They blindly refuse to believe that people in the industry have the interests of both our forests industries and the environment at the front of their minds and in their hearts as they do their jobs.

But, just as I know from personal experience about farmers, I also know, as you do, that those who work in our timber industries love our forests and have a deeper, more active concern for the environment than so many of those who criticise from afar.

The challenge for those of us who support the timber industry, here in Tasmania and throughout Australia, is to continue to stand tall, be strong and be proud of that Industry.

Having mentioned those critics of the timber industry, I want to make a couple of brief points that I would hope they could take on board.

When individuals or groups can choose which laws should be obeyed and which laws can be ignored, our society is significantly weakened.

Despite the best efforts of both State and National Governments, the best efforts of a broad range of industry scientists and the support of Members of Parliament, there remain small, unrepresentative groups which seek to undermine our timber industries at every turn.

They claim certain laws are bad laws. They claim these laws don't adequately protect the environment. They claim a legitimacy to disrupt and undermine.

They accept neither the will of democratically-elected Parliaments, nor the legitimacy of the jobs you have.

Everyone has the right to lobby Members of Parliament like me for changes to legislation and people do have the right to protest about issues of concern to them.

However, nobody has the right to act illegally in pursuing their own political agenda and they certainly do not have the right to prevent others from doing their jobs and earning a living in a lawful way. .

In recent times, we have seen examples of this type of illegal activity at Triabunna and in our Southern forests and, unfortunately, I am not sure that the punishment in those cases actually fitted the crime.

As an elected representative of many timber communities throughout rural and regional Tasmania, I ask you and your organisation to continue your strong commitment to the democratic process and to the rule of law.

You should also ask your fellow Tasmanians to reject those who promote law-breaking as a legitimate means to an end.

And to those who have been so eager to flout the law to promote a particular political agenda, I would urge you also to consider the damage you are doing to the families and individuals who depend on our sustainable timber industries to feed, clothe, house and educate their children.

Our democracy encourages diversity of opinion. All we ask is that there be respect for the law and for other people in expressing those opinions.

In closing I want to leave you all with one final message that I trust you will share with those who are not able to be here.

I am proud to have been chosen by so many timber communities in my electorate of Apsley to be a voice for them in the Tasmanian Parliament and to help carry out the important review function of our Legislative Council.

I am also a proud member of Timber Communities Australia.

I firmly believe that we are all part of a family; a family where we all rely on one another, support each other and share in the successes or disappointments that go with being part of the timber industry in Tasmania.

I truly believe that, as a united family, we have weathered the storms and done the hard yards.

There will inevitably be more hurdles and challenges ahead, but to my mind we have stood firm, united and constant in our resolve and we all know as a family that those attributes are so very important!

Of equal importance is the determination of the Tasmanian timber industry to produce high value end use for all our timber resources, whether it be sawlogs for the manufacture of fine furniture or pulp for the production of high quality paper.

In this regard, perhaps the most important area of focus for us all is to provide maximum return from our forest resources and products to benefit our family, the industry and all Tasmanians.

On a closely related matter, as we continue to strive for this vision of Tasmania's timber industry to be fully realised, another ray of light appeared this week with the positive announcement by Gunns Ltd in relation to a joint venture partner for the Bell Bay Pulp Mill.

I am sure we all hope that this long journey is close to reaching its destination.

Finally, can I say that to be accepted as part of the TCA family is a great privilege for me.

I would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm my full commitment to support the Tasmanian timber industry and my commitment to help it achieve its goal of *Moving Forward*.

I trust there will be ample opportunity today for interaction amongst those attending this conference, with plenty of networking and loads of positive suggestions on how we can move forward.

Most of all, I hope you will all enjoy this day together as part of a unique family.

Thank you again for inviting me to share this special day with you.

It now gives me much pleasure to declare the TCA Tasmanian State Conference officially opened.
