

Science versus science fiction

A Speech to the Institute of Foresters of Australia

By the Hon, Senator Eric Abetz, Minister for Forestry Fisheries and Conservation

Coffs Harbour - 4 June 2007

RELEVANT EXTRACTS

The amount of media space given to the unsubstantiated and wild claims regularly made by the extreme Green movement about the supposedly negative impact of the forest industry.

Sure, from time to time the responses to these claims from myself, or indeed the Institute of Foresters, are published.

But the unfortunate reality is that most mud, when thrown, sticks.

And make no mistake. The mud thrown by the extreme Greens over the past three decades has stuck.

Most disturbingly, unlike professionals like you from the Institute of Foresters, these extreme Greens groups apparently do not feel themselves to be bound by fact or ethics – or bother to correct the record when exposed.

If I was to make an assertion about the activities of a certain Green Senator which turned out to be incorrect, I would – quite rightly – be held to account for that false claim.

So too, I have no doubt, would this organisation if it made a similar false claim.

But not the Green movement.

Out of Control

I produce as evidence an essay which recently came across my desk.

Published here in Australia in last month's *The Monthly* as "Out of Control", and in the magazine of the *Daily Telegraph* in the United Kingdom on 21st April as "Paradise Razed", this essay tells more untruths than Pinocchio on a bad day.

We are all used to this sort of rubbish being published here in Australia. But the publication of this piece of fiction in the United Kingdom, in such a widely read newspaper, has no doubt done untold damage to the Australian forest industry.

This piece was penned by Tasmanian author Richard Flanagan, someone widely known and acknowledged for his works of fiction.

Can I say, this will enhance his reputation for writing fiction.

Across 11 pages of anti-forestry diatribe, Mr Flanagan has managed to insert up to **70 deliberate or inexcusably negligent errors of fact**, selective citing of fact, or twisting of facts.

But will Mr Flanagan be held accountable for these mistruths?

I doubt it.

Having said that, there is one telling fact in this piece: Flanagan correctly quotes me as stating that Tasmania's forests are "the best managed in the world", but nowhere in his following 11 closely-typed pages does he identify any country in the world where forestry is done better. Not one.

He is not alone here. Regularly I have put this question to extreme greens - including to Senator Bob Brown: "where in the world is forestry done better than in Tasmania?"

The answer is always the same - silence. A silence disclosing that Tasmania- and Australia - really is a world leader in renewable forestry.

Now, if you will indulge me, I will delve a little deeper into this piece of "pulp" fiction.

Glib lines but not facts

Typical of the extreme conservation movement, Flanagan constantly resorts to **glib, false claims, easily refuted** by the actual facts.

I won't go through the whole 70 instances - I know I've only got 20 minutes - but here are a few glaring examples.

For example, Flanagan asserts that:

"The great majority of Tasmanians appear to be overwhelmingly opposed to old-growth logging."

But at the 2006 Tasmanian state election, the Greens party - the only party with a policy to completely end old-growth forestry in Tasmania - polled just 17 percent of the vote. Their vote actually declined from the previous state election.

Hardly a "great majority".

Or take the 2004 Federal election. The election where the Labor Party, supported by the Greens, put forward a policy to shut down the Tasmanian forest industry.

The result: the Labor Party lost two House of Representatives and a Senate seat while the Greens Senate vote actually declined from the 2001 Federal election.

Or take his **claim that the logging industry has been found to be illegal** by the Federal Court.

False. Rather, the Federal Court found that in one small patch of forest in Tasmania - not the entire timber industry as Flanagan asserts - Forestry Tasmania was operating contrary to the terms of the Tasmanian Regional Forest

agreement, as defined by the court – and this is currently the subject of a Federal Court appeal.

The bottom line, forestry in Tasmania **simply is not illegal** as Flanagan asserts. The problem is, readers in the UK of his article would have no knowledge of the Wielangta case, and would swallow the false assertions he made.

I looked hard, but **nowhere did Flanagan mention that 47 percent of Tasmania's** forests are forever protected from harvesting.

Or that 79 percent of Tasmania's old-growth forests, including 53 percent of the Styx, are similarly protected. That's around **1 million hectares of old-growth forest**.

And yet he has the gall to seek to mislead readers with the claim that soon Tasmania's great forests will *"belong only to myth...as the last of these extraordinary places is sacrificed to the wood-chipper's greed..."*

Wrong. Untrue. A lie. Tasmania will continue to have 47 percent of its forests, and **44 percent of its land mass**, protected from harvesting from now and forever.

And contrary, to Flanagan's repeated assertions, old-growth forests aren't harvested for woodchips. They're harvested for craft wood, furniture, sawmilling and veneering. It is the residue which is chipped for paper, rather than simply being wasted.

Or take Flanagan's dismissal of the Howard Government's 2004 election policy as *"a sop"* and *"a con."*

As a result of this policy, another **139,500ha of forest** was added to the extensive Tasmanian reserve system, 121,200ha of that old growth.

In fact, far from being *"a con"*, **an extra 13,800 hectares of forest** – including 700 ha more old growth forest – was protected than originally pledged.

The UN benchmark for protection of such forest communities is just **10 percent**.

No wonder no one can refute my claim about Tasmania's forest management being world leading.

Flanagan – like his fellow travellers in the extreme Green movement - simply cannot get his head around the fact that the use of timber products is legitimate, and it is environmentally friendly.

Moreover, I find it astounding that an author, someone who makes his living producing books, does not believe that the production of paper is an acceptable use of resources!

I've sent a letter to this effect to both *The Monthly* and *The Telegraph*, and only time will see if they're published.

But I ask – why would a fiction writer's contribution be accepted on forestry?

Let's get articles printed from foresters critiquing novels!

Or maybe you could form a new lobby group, Foresters for Novels?!

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