

## THE TASMANIAN PULP MILL—BELL BAY INDUSTRIAL ESTATE, TAMAR VALLEY

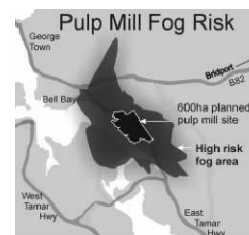
### Claims of “White out” Fog at Interstate I75 crossing the Hiwassee River Valley Tennessee USA

Some submissions to the Commonwealth Government in June 2007 expressed concern that emission of drying air from the pulp drying machine was likely to cause a visible plume during the cool and cold seasons and this plume could extend over the East Tamar Highway and present a road safety hazard.

Claims that the Bell Bay pulp mill would cause “white out” on the nearby East Derwent Highway were first raised by former RPDC assessment panel member Warwick Raverty at a public lecture in Launceston on 26th March 2007<sup>1</sup>. Dr Raverty had claimed:

“This is a real issue with a tonne of water vapour expelled into the atmosphere for every tonne of pulp produced. In Alabama, USA, there is a pulp and paper mill operated by Kimberly Clark that produces water vapour in similar quantities and this produces 'white-outs' on local highways that have been responsible for multiple pile-ups and deaths.”

Claims of a “white out” are again included in a January 2010 newsletter for a group originally known as Tasmanians Against Pulp Mill, but now publishing as TAP for a better Tasmania. However the incident Dr Raverty was referring to happened in the state of Tennessee, near a pulp and newsprint mill operated by Bowater as the Interstate I75 crossed the fog prone Hiwassee River Valley near Calhoun.



Bowater had built its mill in the 1950's and had located settling ponds for its waste water treatment along the Hiwassee River. The Interstate was then built in the 1970s and suffered a series of crashes due to reduced visibility by fog, culminating in a multi vehicle pileup in 1990. A National Safety Transportation Board investigation of this major crash involving 99 vehicles with 12 deaths and 42 injured, recommended a new reduced visibility warning system but did not link the fog to the nearby mill<sup>2</sup>.

However there was concern that the mill's steam may have intensified the fog, causing “white out”. A lawyer acting for the family of a truck driver killed in the crash visited the site<sup>3</sup> and ‘observed large waste water treatment ponds straddling I-75.’ Given the history of this stretch of interstate and the location of these ponds, he suspected some connection.

This observation led to a three year legal battle for compensation, including expert and counter-experts, modelling and differing theories, and was finally settled out of court, with Bowater not admitting liability but agreeing to a settlement of roughly \$13.5 million. Additionally, Bowater closed the ponds straddling the interstate.

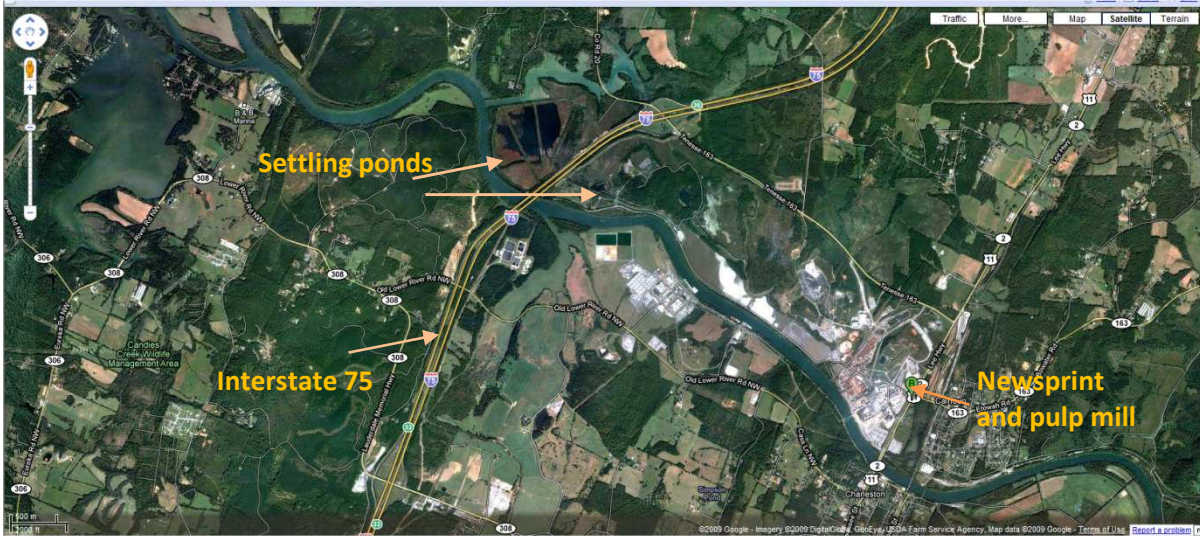
Some, but not all, of the story was recorded in a documentary-drama style program *Forensic files* shown in 2005, and was the basis of Dr Raverty's original claims and is still available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4HUoZ3reA34>. However other websites such as [http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Hiwassee\\_River](http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Hiwassee_River) attribute the multi car accident to “Reduced visibility from naturally occurring fog”.

<sup>1</sup> Raverty W, 2007, Lecture Notes published by TAP at <http://www.tapvision.info/node/117> accessed 15/01/10

<sup>2</sup> NTSB 1992, Highway Accident Report HAR-92/02 at <http://www.nts.gov/publicctn/1992/HAR9202.htm> accessed 15/01/10

<sup>3</sup> Douglas J Fees, Downing Vs. Bowater <http://www.douglasifeeslaw.com/achievements.jsp> accessed 15/01/10

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Satellite image from Google Maps showing mill site, settling ponds and I75

The highway is still subject to fog and the State of Tennessee spent \$4.5 million on a sophisticated warning system. This system covers 30.6 kilometres including a five-kilometre, fog-prone section above the Hiwassee River and 13 kilometre road sections on each side of the river<sup>4</sup>.

Safety improved significantly after deployment of the warning system in 1994, as only one crash has occurred in fog. However, the closed settling ponds astride the highway are unlikely to be the cause, as from October to March, the low visibility warning system is typically activated about once a week. Ninety-five percent of system activations result in a speed limit reduction to 50 mph, approximately 13 percent of activations required further reduction to 35 mph.

### Summary

Waste water treatment for Tasmania's approved mill is parallel to, rather than astride the nearby highway. Mill designers are confident that white out will not be a significant problem.

The geography of the Tamar Valley and its vulnerability to fog at Bell Bay is not the same as the inland river valley of Hiwassee River

In its 2007 response to submissions<sup>5</sup> under the Commonwealth EPBC Act, the developer stated:

“New modelling run has confirmed that the original predictions remain valid and that there will be no occurrences of dense fog on the East Tamar Highway as a result of the pulp mill (or other industries).”

It is astounding that these claims already dealt with in 2007 are still being made to create community concern and opposition to the approved mill.



<sup>4</sup> US Department of Transportation, 2003, Best Practices for Road Weather Management case Studies [http://www.ops.fhwa.dot.gov/weather/best\\_practices/CaseStudies/022.pdf](http://www.ops.fhwa.dot.gov/weather/best_practices/CaseStudies/022.pdf) accessed 15 Jan 2010

<sup>5</sup> Gunns Limited 2007 *Response to submissions under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* available from <http://www.gunnspulpmill.com.au/epbc/default.php>