

## **Opportunities for Southern Tasmania**

Approximately 85 people braved a cold, wintry, Wednesday night to attend the second Southern Private Forestry Forum, facilitated by Private Forests Tasmania (PFT). The attendees were many and varied, including:

- Politicians and local government (ex- and current);
- Government;
- Landowners;
- Forestry companies; and
- Environmental non-government organisations.

Penny Wells, PFT's newly appointed CEO, opened by introducing everyone (including PFT's very newly appointed Chair of the Board, Evan Rolley) to the evening and to the evening's keynote speaker The Hon. Guy Barnett, Minister for Building and Construction, Minister for Energy, Minister for Resources and Minister for Veteran's Affairs.

The Minister emphasised how much change is happening within Southern Tasmania's forestry industry, which has created increasing optimism and greater opportunities; in particular the Hobart Wharf now has 5 timber exporters. The State Government's role in the future planning of a bulk commodity export facility and associated infrastructure was broached and the Minister's take home message was "*Wood is good*".

Martin Moroni, Business Development Manager PFT, as the evening's MC, introduced the 1<sup>st</sup> Expert Panel of forestry professionals:

- Jason Bolch, SFM Environmental Management;
- Heath Blair & Owen Hoffman, Reliance Forest Fibre;
- James Neville-Smith, Southwood Fibre Pty Ltd;
- Allen Wong, Wood Based Products; and
- Penny Wells, CEO Private Forests Tasmania.

Each panel member briefly described their company's opportunities for Southern Tasmania before Martin opened-up for questions from the audience.

- Penny Wells outlined the strategic planning and stakeholder consultation underway at Private Forests Tasmania that will underpin its future directions.
- Allen Wong described how his company were interested in plantation wood from across the State and were also interested in native forest logs. These would supply Malaysian veneer mills. He also indicated his company's interest in establishing a peeler plant in northern Tasmania.

- Jason Bolch and Heath Blair talked about the buoyant market for wood products and the relatively good prices currently being received for logs and chips and the expanded area in which it would be attractive for private landowners to sell their wood.
- Jason Bolch indicated to landowners who were having trouble entering the market that they should call him or other panel members to give a free quick inspection of their property to determine whether a profitable outcome was likely. Jason indicated that many companies would provide that service and PFT can help link landowners to these companies.
- Heath Blair discussed Reliance Forest Fibre's takeover of NSFP's SmartFibre export facility indicating that the level of service remained the same and that they were continuing all earlier market initiatives.
- James Neville-Smith mentioned the withdrawal of Southwood Fibre's proposal for a bulk loading facility at Dover, and the issues facing timber owners in southern Tasmania.

Following the panel member introductions, discussions flowed between panel members and the audience, covering a wide range of subjects including:

- the Government's role in the future planning for options to alleviate issues in southern forestry, and specific issues facing growers, particularly south of Hobart;
- need for integrated/long-term solutions to these issues, involving both domestic processing and export facilities (with the panel noting the export of logs from Macquarie wharf is guaranteed for another 3.5 years only);
- the need for both plantation and native forests in Tasmanian production forestry as their timber and products are distinct in their properties and characteristics;
- the need for viable markets for residues, allowing fully integrated harvests of forests to occur - reducing waste and increases profitability;
- environmental benefits of maintaining old growth forests;
- means of communicating outcomes and sentiments expressed at the forum.

The panel discussion included a range of opinions. Overall, the 1<sup>st</sup> Expert Panel was a lively debate that often kept the MC working!!

Next, a 45 minute intermission allowed discussions to continue informally as attendees availed themselves of the necessary refreshments and cheese platters.

Delegates, reluctantly, re-seated for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Expert Panel focussed on agroforestry and initiatives to get trees into the agricultural landscape:

- Martin Moroni, Private Forests Tasmania;
- Vivek Dugar, WeAct Pty Ltd;
- James Bullinski, CO<sub>2</sub> Australia;

The MC, Martin Moroni, doubled-up as speaker to talk about the results of PFT's collaboration with CSIRO & UTas to investigate the production and financial gains from treed shelterbelts. In general the results show:

- an increase in yields;
- reduced evaporation, therefore more available moisture and efficient water use;
- the combined outputs of amenity, timber, arable & livestock production were modelled and indicated significant gains, with shelter increasing crop and animal production yields by 1-3 thousand per year once trees are established, as well as providing a wood check at rotation end.

Basically, the treed shelterbelt landscapes are more productive.

Vivek (WeAct) and James (CO2 Australia) discussed their carbon-based incentives for the establishment of plantations on green-field sites and the conversion of short-term to long-term plantations.

WeAct made the point that they were interested in engaging with smaller landowners through an aggregation model. WeAct indicated the potential for some flexibility in making some monies available 'up-front' which could assist in establishment costs, particularly once some critical thresholds were reached.

There was some early discussion on how the Tasmanian Government, possibly through PFT, could potentially be involved to assist landowners participate.

The carbon-based financial incentives provided may provide opportunities for landowners to consider planting trees in the agricultural landscape and/or replant areas of harvested plantations. A recent trend of not replanting due to perceived impediments was noted in the discussion. Ultimately, farmers may need to add carbon to their product diversity. Monies for carbon have the potential to significantly cover the costs of establishing new plantations, likely making available 1-3 thousand per ha over a period of 10-15 years for new plantations.

Panel members estimated that the Clean Energy Regulator has over \$250 million in funds that could be awarded to carbon abatement projects, sufficient to support further auctions should the CER decide to call them.

From the evening's discussions, formal and informal, the need for diversity was a dominant theme, including the need for:

- diverse products;
- diverse markets;
- diverse agricultural enterprises; and
- diverse establishment options.

The evening finished with more refreshments and an extended opportunity for networking with a very diverse group of forestry associates that extended until 10pm.

Overall, the event was an informative, positive and spirited evening.

NB - thanks must go to the staff at the Royal Hobart Showground, their efforts made the evening go very smoothly.