

Forestry Tasmania's ongoing logging in proposed new forest reserves

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Photo Alan Lesheim

Executive Summary

An audit of Forestry Tasmania's logging plans by environment groups shows Forestry Tasmania has not only failed to cease logging within proposed new forest reserves, but since receiving a \$12.5 million government payout, it has increased the number of logging operations within the new reserve areas — a move directly at odds with the Tasmanian Forests Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA).

This direction is set to continue. The January 2012 Conservation Agreement allows a higher rate of logging in the proposed reserves than was originally set in Forestry Tasmania's Three Year Wood Production Plan¹.

Despite the delivery of other components of the IGA — including the \$12.5m payment to Forestry Tasmania — this government business enterprise had failed to cease logging within new forest reserves.

Background

On 14th of October 2010, non-government stakeholders around native forest logging – union, industry, timber community and conservation group representatives – signed a Statement of Principles (SOP) to address the forest industry crisis by protecting 572,000 hectares of important native forests identified by environmental groups and transitioning the industry to largely use plantation resources. The SOP included a provision of a logging moratorium within the 572,000 ha to be implemented within three months of signing.

Since the SOP, a moratorium on logging in the proposed new reserves has remained a key part of subsequent negotiations and agreements. On the 14 December 2010, federal Environment Minister Burke and former Premier David Bartlett announced their support for the Statement of Principles and committed to place a moratorium on logging within the 572,000 ha of proposed new forest reserves within three months.

Three months later, the lack of any progress to deliver an effective moratorium led Minister Bryan Green to instruct Forestry Tasmania in writing to implement the moratorium. By August 2010, when the Federal and State governments signed the Tasmanian Forests Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA), Forestry Tasmania was still logging inside the proposed new forest reserves.

The IGA committed to place 430,000 ha of forests under immediate protection while a verification process was undertaken, and to reschedule other logging coupes out of the broader 572,000 hectares of proposed reserves. In cases where a mill's wood supply could not be provided through rescheduling, the IGA included a clear provision to pay compensation to the affected mill. The work of the verification consultants was significantly limited by the failure by Forestry Tasmania to undertake the necessary pre-planning and rescheduling after earlier government direction to reschedule logging out of the proposed new forest reserves. This included a critical failure by Forestry Tasmania to factor the known moratorium commitments into its Three Year Wood Production Plan.

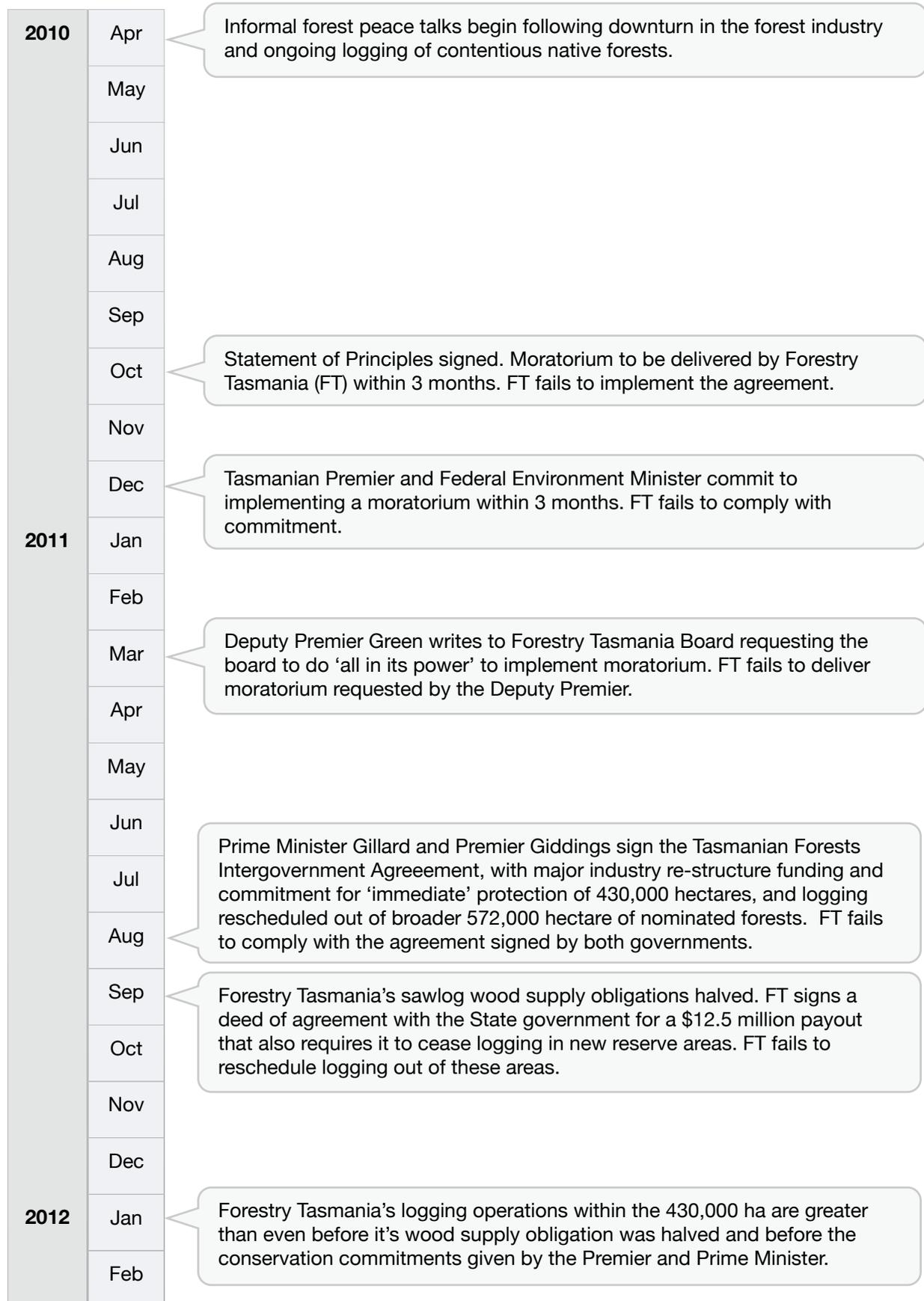
During September 2011, a deed was agreed between the State Government and Forestry Tasmania for a \$12.5 million payment to Forestry Tasmania that required it to do all that it can to facilitate the IGA, and not to supply wood or allow wood production within the proposed new forest reserves, subject to clause 26 of the IGA.

Despite receiving the \$12.5 million payment and despite the delivery of other parts of the IGA, Forestry Tasmania have still failed to cease logging within new forest reserves.

On 13 January 2012, Minister Burke, Minister Green and Forestry Tasmania signed a Conservation Agreement that allows Forestry Tasmania to largely continue its planned logging of 1,900 ha within the new forest reserves during the first half of 2012. This means the Conservation Agreement protected only those forests that Forestry Tasmania had not included in logging plans. In other words, it provided temporary protection for forests that were not going to be logged and allows business as usual logging of contentious areas.

The course of this process is summarised in the timeline on the following page.

Figure 1. Tasmanian forest talks timeline



Recent logging within 430,000 ha new forest reserves

The IGA required a complete cessation of logging within 430,000 hectares of the total 572,000 hectare reserve area nominated by environment groups. In light of Forestry Tasmania's failures in implementing the conservation requirements of the agreement, environment groups have conducted an analysis of the rate of logging within the 430,000 hectares of new forest reserves.

In summary, the available data shows the rate of logging within the 430,000 ha of forests to be protected will be higher than the rate that would have been expected under business as usual scenarios outlined in Forestry Tasmania's Three Year Wood Production Plan 2011-12¹.

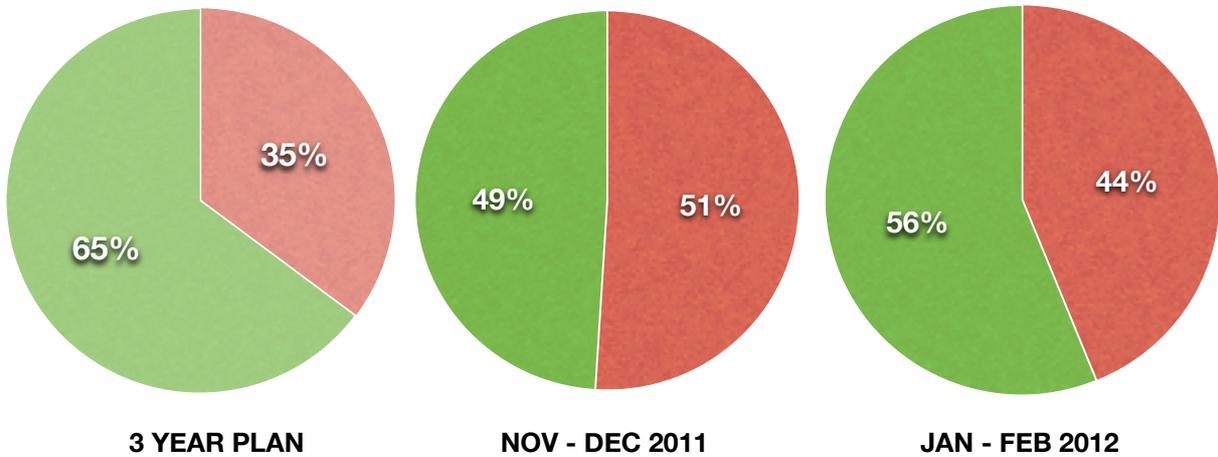
Of note:

- In the Three Year Plan, 36% of the high quality sawlog supply for 2011-12 was set to come from within the 430,000 ha. However, data from the independent rescheduler shows that between January and February 2012, 44% of the high quality sawlog supply will come from within the 430,000 ha². For November and December 2011, the rate was over 50%. Figure 2 and table 1 summarize these figures.
- For 2011 - 12, the Three Year Plan shows less than a quarter of the year's coupes would come from within the 430,000 ha, but data from the independent rescheduler² shows nearly 40% of the coupes to be logged in the January to February 2012 period would be from within this area (figure 3 and table 2).
- The Three Year Plan scheduled an annual cut within the 430,000 ha of just over 3,000 ha during 2011 - 12. However, just in the four months from November to February nearly half of this amount, or 1,449 ha has been excluded from the Conservation Agreement and is available for active logging.

By each of these measures the 'rescheduled' rate of logging is higher than would be expected under the planned 'business as usual' logging. However, given the massive decline in log demand in the last year, this variance is even more extreme.

Significantly, the Three Year Plan was based on the assumption that Forestry Tasmania would need to supply 300,000 cubic metres of high quality sawlogs. When Gunns Limited sawlog quota was retired during 2011, the supply requirement was approximately halved. Despite this large reduction in demand, Forestry Tasmania has actually escalated logging inside new forest reserves.

In the period from March to June it appears logging may be reduced below business as usual rates. However, given that clause 3.3 specifically allows additional harvesting to occur in this period if Forestry Tasmania believes it needs the extra wood, this remains to be seen.



(Business as usual for 2011-12 and assuming need to supply 300,000 cubic metres of NF sawlogs)

Figure 2. The proportion of high quality sawlog volumes taken within the 430,000 ha of new forest reserves in the four months to Feb 2012 is significantly higher than scheduled for 2011-12 in Forestry Tasmania’s Three Year Plan^{1,2}.

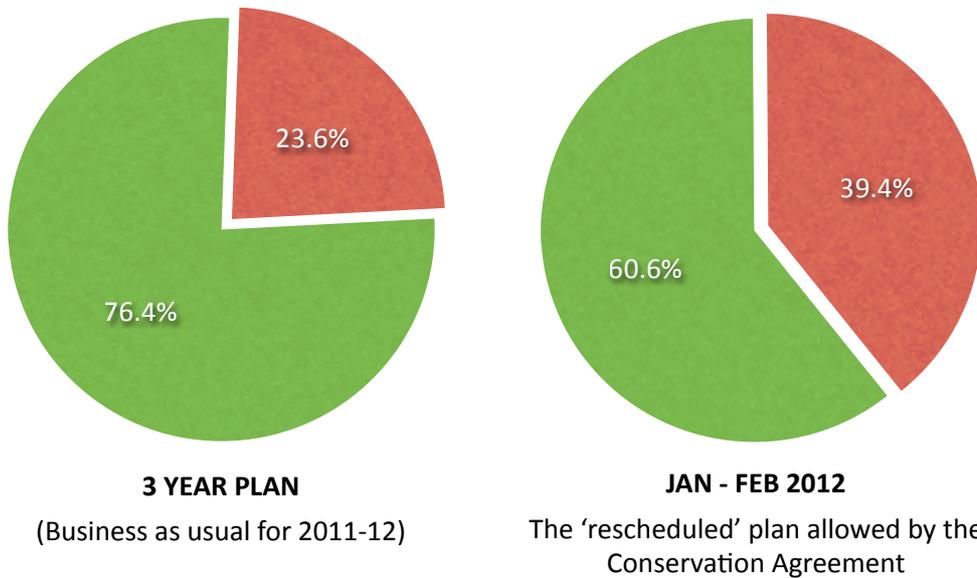


Figure 3. Proportion of logging coupes to be sourced from new forest reserves. Forestry Tasmania initially planned that under a quarter of their logging coupes would be within the 430,000 ha forests. Following the Conservation Agreement, almost 40% of the coupes to be logged during Jan and Feb 2012 will now be within the new forest reserves^{1,2}.

Table 1. Volume and Percentage of total State Forest high-quality sawlog cut from within 430,000 ha new forest reserves^{1,2}.

High-quality sawlog volumes	cubic metres	%
Three Year Plan: Proposed 2011-12 Cut		
Total cut	302,900	
Within 430k new forest reserves	109,800	36%
Nov - Dec 2011 Cut		
Total cut	25,400	
Within 430k new forest reserves	13,100	52%
Jan - Feb 2012 Cut		
Total cut	27,700	
Within 430k new forest reserves	12,300	44%

Table 2. Proportion of all state native forest coupes within 430,000 ha new forest reserves^{1,2}.

	Total coupes	Total coupes within 430k	Percentage coupes within 430k
Three Year Plan: 2011-12 (business as usual)	339	80	23.6%
Rescheduled plan Jan - Feb 2012	66	26	39.4%

References

¹ Forestry Tasmania (2011) Three Year Wood Production Plan 2011/12. Forestry Tasmania, Hobart.

² Hoffmann, O and Williams, D (12 Oct 2011) Report of independent expert schedulers appointed under the Tasmanian Forests Intergovernmental Agreement. ([Download link](#))