

Australians rally over future of Tasmania forest

June 14 2014



Some 5,000 Tasmanians rally to oppose the delisting of Tasmania's World Heritage forests in Hobart, June 14, 2014

Thousands of Australians rallied Saturday against the proposed logging of protected forests in rugged Tasmania ahead of a UNESCO World Heritage meeting where the issue will be discussed.

The conservative government has asked UNESCO to revoke its World

Heritage listing for 74,000 hectares (183,000 acres) of forest, claiming it was not pristine, and open it up to the [timber industry](#).

The annual World Heritage Committee meeting starts Sunday in Doha, with up to 5,000 people protesting the move outside Tasmania's state parliament in Hobart.

The area slated for delisting is part of 120,000 hectares added last year to the Tasmanian Wilderness area under the previous Labor government—culminating a long battle waged by environmentalists.

"The Abbott government is attacking the notion of World Heritage by proposing to log iconic Tasmanian forests already accepted as World Heritage," said Wilderness Society official Vica Bayley.

"With ancient trees up to 100 metres tall, these forests are the Southern Hemisphere's equivalent of the Californian Redwoods."

Australia's timber industry has an annual turnover of Aus\$22 billion (US\$19.7 billion) of economic turnover each year, contributes around Aus\$8 billion to the country's GDP and employs more than 66,000 people, with Prime Minister Tony Abbott wanting more forest available.



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"We don't support, as a government and as a coalition, further lockouts of our forests. We just don't support it," he told a timber industry function earlier this year.

"We have quite enough national parks, we have quite enough locked up forests already. In fact, in an important respect, we have too much locked up forest."

The government claims the area it wants delisted is already "degraded", having been logged before. Opponents say only 8.6 percent of it has been disturbed with the rest pristine old-growth rainforest.

The opposition Greens Party has labelled Abbott the "dig it up, cut it down [prime minister](#)" with the government's environmental credentials

under close scrutiny since coming to office last September.

In December, the government approved a massive coal port expansion and the dumping of dredge waste in the Great Barrier Reef, a move that alarmed UNESCO.

The fate of the biodiverse reef is another issue that the World Heritage Committee will examine in Doha.

It is under growing pressure not just from climate change and the destructive coral-eating crown of thorns starfish, but agricultural runoff and rampant coastal development linked to mining.

UNESCO is considering downgrading the reef's status to "World Heritage in Danger" in the absence of Australia showing "substantial" progress in dealing with the problems.

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