

# Tasmania scraps 'peace deal' that protects native forests

September 4 2014, by Michael Hopkin

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The repeal could pave the way for logging in Tasmania's tall forests, after a six-year moratorium. Credit: TTaylor/Wikimedia Commons

Tasmania's government has repealed the state's forestry "peace deal", removing around 400,000 hectares of forests from reserves across the state and potentially leaving them open to future logging.

The state parliament's upper house voted to scrap the four-year-old

Tasmanian Forests Intergovernmental Agreement, leaving in place a six-year moratorium after which the possibility of logging in these areas can be assessed.

Russell Warman, of the University of Tasmania's School of Land and Food, wrote in *The Conversation* that the decision will increase the uncertainty for both the timber industry and conservationists.

The peace deal had successfully brokered a truce between the two sides, after decades of acrimony, by paying logging firms not to fell native old-growth forest.

The Liberal government, which won power in March, promised to rip up the deal amid complaints that it was costing jobs.

Yet while it is difficult to predict what will happen in six years' time, observers say that lifting environmental protections won't automatically herald a boom for the timber industry.

"There is a six-year moratorium, so in the sense of what happens on the ground there doesn't seem to be much change yet. But the legislation allows that in time, if the government and industry wanted to, they could go into those areas," Warman said.

"But because of the decline in the market conditions over the past several years, there might not be the opportunity to grow the industry in the way that some people would like."

The other issue is whether the [timber industry](#) will be able to win a sustainable certification from the [Forest Stewardship Council](#) – something that is increasingly important for selling timber on the international market.

Warman said certification would probably depend on ensuring that enough areas are not logged, in the absence of formal protection. What's more, rolling back the peace deal could make winning certification even harder.

"It's certainly not impossible to get FSC certification now, but it has probably become more difficult. Given the concentration of high conservation values in the areas previously slated for protection, bringing them back into a potential harvest regime will affect certification assessment," he said.

## **Climate of risk**

David Bowman of the University of Tasmania, who studies the effects of fire on the state's forest landscapes, said no one involved in the debate has given due consideration to the growing risk of devastating fires, similar to those seen in Victoria in recent years, that could radically alter the forests.

"These forests are hugely flammable, and we have to confront the fact that it's quite possible that we could be looking at forest landscapes that are wildly different in six years' time," he said.

"We haven't had a major fire event in Tasmania's tall forests since 1967. A large fire would have a massive impact on both old-growth forest and wood supply. Tasmanians haven't really internalised the lessons from Victoria.

"We need to think, on both sides of the argument, about how we will deal with the growing threat of catastrophic landscape change. I'm not seeing a debate on either side about how we're going to conserve those systems on one hand, and have a sustainable wood supply on the other. It could be that in six or ten years' time we turn around and say 'what were

we fighting about'?"

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Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Tasmania scraps 'peace deal' that protects native forests (2014, September 4) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-09-tasmania-scraps-peace-nativeforests.html>

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