

Doorstop with the Hon. Will Hodgman MP, Premier of Tasmania and Senator the Hon. Anne Ruston, Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources

PRIME MINISTER:

It is great to be hear at the Neville Smith Forest Products.

Richard and James, who is running the business and we were just saying that this business, this great renewable and sustainable Tasmanian business, just like its products, was started nearly a century ago by your dad. What a great achievement that is.

What a great commitment to a great Australian, a great Tasmanian industry, the timber industry, renewable and sustainable. Supporting 3,600 jobs.

The announcement today is all about Tasmanian jobs, giving the workers here, the men we were talking to in the factory a moment ago, giving them the security that they need to know that their jobs will be here because of the Regional Forest Agreement being extended now, extended into forever, for years to come. It will be rolling over every five years.

The Premier and I have signed that and it has been witnessed by Anne Ruston, the Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Guy Barnett, Will's Minister for Resources. Shows real commitment from the Federal Government, the Australian Government and the Tasmanian Government.

So we have had a great visit. We really enjoyed talking about the species that go into the beautiful timbers that are being produced here, the way the industry is developing, the high-value products that are being created here with great innovation, great technology here in Tasmania.

Anne and I are delighted to be here on behalf of the Federal Government together with our Tasmanian Senators, Jonno Duniam and David Bushby, here supporting Tasmanian jobs. That's what this is all about.

And you know something? This is a business that will benefit this year from our company tax cuts. We are providing tax cuts for small and medium businesses up to \$50 million turnover. What we are giving is that support but again it gives this business and others like it the incentive to invest and employ. Jobs, economic growth, investment – that's what we are committed to and that's what we are delivering.

THE HON. WILL HODGMAN MP, PREMIER OF TASMANIA:

Thanks Prime Minister and to Senator Ruston and to Senators Duniam and Bushby and to my Minister Guy Barnett.

To James and Richard, thank you very much for having us here at this iconic Tasmanian business. It is a true success story, one which has a very bright future as does our state and its forest industry.

We are a State Government that has been a strong supporter of Tasmania's forest industry since we came to government three and a half years ago.

In that time, we have turned around an industry that was on its knees. There are now more employed people working in this industry. Its export values have increased. The levels of confidence in Tasmania's forest industry have increased.

This is a great example of a Tasmanian business that is now looking to the future to invest more and to employ more Tasmanians and I think it is fitting that today we strike a new historic partnership for this industry between state and Commonwealth governments noting that, back in 1997, it was Liberal Premier Tony Rundle and the Coalition Prime Minister John Howard who struck that historic agreement 20 years ago.

Again, it's Liberal governments, Coalition Government in Canberra, that are signing the deal to provide resource security and certainty for this industry and its employees but also importantly, very contemporary management processes contained within this and the laws that ensure that we continue to look after our precious environment and also equally to sustain the values that are inherent in Tasmania's forest industry and our reserves.

Of course noting that around half the state is, in fact, protected in reserves but also this agreement importantly captures our value and appreciation for Indigenous heritage, for ecological and environmental values, also economic and social benefits that come off the back of what is one of Tasmania's great competitive strengths.

We grow trees very well, we harvest them to world standards and they are a product that's becoming increasingly valuable in a global market that has its eye on renewable, sustainable industries and Tasmania's forest industry is one of those.

SENATOR THE HON. ANNE RUSTON, ASSISTANT MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND WATER RESOURCES:

Thank you very much. It is fantastic to be down here today in support of the Tasmanian forest industry, an industry that every Tasmanian should be absolutely rightly proud of. But the most important thing for us is the signing of the revising updated RFA, because I think it's a demonstration that they are an extraordinarily effective management tool for forestry.

What we've done in the last review process is update the RFA so they are more reflective of contemporary practices. By making them adaptive, changeable, responsive to the conditions and the needs for the forestry sector, we believe that this revised updated RFA will stand us in good stead for the

next 20 years, 30 years, and 50 years.

As we all know, the forestry sector is not something that happens year by year. There is a long-term investment that needs to be made into forestry being successful.

So, today I think it's a demonstration to the Australian forestry sector, but particularly here in Tasmania, that the Tasmanian Government and the Federal Government are committed to your industry into the future. We are committed to the jobs in this industry, but what the signal really sends to those people that want to invest in this fantastic new industry that we see into the future, this is a renaissance of the timber industry in Australia and in the world.

We stand here on the threshold of being able to take advantage of that, and so we are absolutely delighted to resign the first of our RFAs here in Tasmania, because the forestry sector in Australia has got the most amazing future. Today is the first day of that new future.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well said!

The Hon. Guy Barnett MP, Tasmanian Minister FOR RESOURCES:

Thank you. That is worth a clap. Well done, Anne.

Yes. Look, today is an historic day. It is a milestone agreement.

The signing of the Regional Forest agreement will deliver jobs to regional Tasmania. It will provide a sustainable future that's vitally important. It will ensure that we stay in the zone of best practice.

Best practice management in our forest industries is vital, and going forward this Regional Forest Agreement will ensure that we maintain that and keep that moving.

So, it will be a terrific support for jobs in regional Tasmania and we have definitely come a long way and we're on the up in Tasmania. This agreement will underpin it with confidence and will deliver investment, growth and jobs.

PRIME MINISTER:

Very good! Thank you. Some questions?

JOURNALIST:

Mr Turnbull, can you assure Tasmanians that this agreement gets the balance right between protecting the environment and the industry?

PRIME MINISTER:

Yes, it does. I think that's what all of us are saying here.

It's been very well negotiated between our officials, who we have congratulated earlier, and what it does – it is exactly right, it gets the balance right, to ensure that all of your environmental values are protected, but also that you maintain a sustainable forest industry.

You know, it is a renewable and sustainable industry. As we were just discussing with the Neville Smiths father and son a moment ago. The trees take carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere. That tree is harvested, turned into a building, a house. Talk about carbon sequestration – there it is and it is renewable.

That is why, as Anne said, there is a renaissance in the timber industry right around the world. Better technologies, both from a structural and ornamental point of view – you are seeing more use of timber all the time. Is it a 10 story building that is being built out of timber in Brisbane?

PREMIER OF TASMANIA:

Yes, PM.

PRIME MINISTER:

Think about that – you wouldn't have thought of that a few years ago. This is becoming a great age for forest products, timber industry, and it requires really strong sustainable management tools. That's what the revised RFA is.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister, Bob Brown claims that this agreement will clobber the habitat of endangered species such as the Tasmanian Devil. How do you respond to that?

PRIME MINISTER:

I will leave the Premier to say more about it. But not for the first time, I have to disagree with the former senator. Will.

PREMIER OF TASMANIA:

Yeah, look, this is a new deal that is very contemporary, as Anne has said. It has been thoroughly consulted. It has been reviewed, indeed, in previous years, and has very contemporary forest management practices, environmental protections, a very close eye on ensuring that there is greater protections for threatened and endangered species, and we are very confident that not only can it provide great certainty and security for an iconic Tasmanian industry, but the environmental protections that have long been contained within the RFA are, in fact, improved.

It can give Tasmanians confidence that we balance our precious environment with one of our great competitive strengths – and that is our renewable forest industry.

ASSISTANT MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND WATER RESOURCES:

Well, only in as much to say that the revised agreement is taking a much more proactive approach in relation to how we deal with endangered and threatened species. I think it is always worthwhile remembering that according to the Threatened Species Commissioner, Gregory Andrews, there has been no Australian species made endangered or extinct by the actions of forestry. And it is very very important that we remember that.

JOURNALIST:

What are the key revisions in terms of the environmental provisions in this agreement compared to the one that was signed 20 years ago?

ASSISTANT MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND WATER RESOURCES:

The majority of the revisions of the review came out and found most of the practices that were part of the original agreement are sustainable and need to be continued into the future. But there were a number of areas that were highlighted.

One of them was how we explicitly treat endangered and threatened species. That's been included in the new agreement.

We also are quite explicit in acknowledging climate change and the need to have a response to climate change and mitigation against climate change impacts in the forestry sector, which has been very important.

The Australian public expect a greater level of transparency. We will make sure that the people have got a much better line of sight over what's actually occurring in our forestry harvesting sector.

So, they are the kinds of things that we will be revised and renewed to reflect the contemporary practices of 2017.

Largely, the review came back and said that they were an of effective management tool. So the lion's share of the provisions of 1997 will be included in the 2017 agreement.

JOURNALIST:

Why was the decision made to have a revision of this agreement every five years, as compared to 20 in the last agreement?

ASSISTANT MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND WATER RESOURCES:

Okay – there has been a 5-year agreement. A 5-year rolling agreement what we have chosen to do with the new agreement, instead of going five, five, five, and then at 20 years having a sort of a major revamp of the agreement, we have said that every five years, if you meet your requirements and you make your changes at that five yearly agreement, then we will add another five years at the end of it .

The main reason for this is that we need to provide certainty to the industry, particularly around investment. At the moment the biggest challenge

to the Australian forestry sector is we don't have enough supply. So, if we want to get more supply we have got to get investors having the confidence that they want into invest in this industry and put the innovation and the technology in place so we are actually can realising greater value from every tree that we seek to harvest.

PRIME MINISTER:

Getting some more square metres from every cubic metre, right?

ASSISTANT MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND WATER RESOURCES:

I have heard that somewhere before today, Prime Minister!

PRIME MINISTER:

That's right, see.

JOURNALIST:

(inaudible) Say that its had no positive outcomes for the industry. What's your response to that?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well as you've just heard we disagree with that. We've just had Ross Hampton speaking on behalf of the industry saying how important it is. So that is a criticism we reject.

JOURNALIST:

Surely you can't argue with the fact though that in the last 20 years the forestry industry in Tasmania experienced a major down turn, how did this agreement help protect against that?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well that's as Will said, that was really the result of Labor Green governments that wanted to run down the forest industry. What you now have is a forest products industry that is growing, it has certainty, thanks to this RFA, the review and renewal of the RFA, and I think a growing market for its products.

And as Anne Ruston was just saying a moment ago, the biggest challenge is getting more supply. We were talking earlier about the – making sure that there is the ability to make cross-laminated timber products in Australia, which there is now, with the new – a new mill and plant in Albury, I think, in New South Wales. It is important for us to get – have the certainty – and this is what the RFA process gives you – the certainty to encourage production, more supply at every level of the supply chain. From growing the trees to harvesting them, to milling them, to then doing the sort of more advanced fabrication that you need.

JOURNALIST:

Was a brand new agreement ever on the table or were you always intending to I guess revise or refresh the existing one?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, I will ask Anne – do you want to speak to that?

ASSISTANT MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND WATER RESOURCES:

No, after the reviews were undertaken it became quite apparent that the foundations of the original agreement were very sound. So, we thought it was more expedient and prudent for us to revise the existing agreements and make them better, as opposed to going through an extraordinarily expensive process to actually write a whole new agreement, when the evidence that we'd received from the independent assessments or the very wide consultation that we'd gone through indicated that that wasn't necessary, it was better for both the confidence of the industry, but also the certainty of the continuation of something that people were already comfortable and confident about, to continue on into the future.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister, there has been talk about security today obviously, could it be said that Government has set and forget on the Hobart Airport, with no Federal Police officers there?

PRIME MINISTER:

No. That is absolutely not the case. Look, I won't – I had a press conference in Canberra – some of you may have seen it – with the Commonwealth Counter-terrorism Coordinator and the Director-General of ASIO. So I won't revisit all of that discussion, other than to say that our – we stand in resolute solidarity with the people of Spain. We condemn the Islamist terrorist attacks in and around Barcelona. Our prayers and love go to the victims of these shocking attacks. There is no room for complacency, for set and forget, as you said, in the battle against terrorism.

We have the finest counter-terrorist agencies in the world. Our police and intelligence services are outstanding. Our ADF is outstanding. Just a few weeks ago a plot in Sydney to explode a bomb on an aeroplane was disrupted, contained, and two of the alleged conspirators have been charged and will be going to trial.

Now, we have to allocate our counter-terrorist and security resources in accordance with risk. It is very important that we do so. It is very important for Tasmanians that we do so. A big aeroplane, flying off to Europe from Sydney Airport, will undoubtedly have a number of Tasmanians on it. So, it is vitally important for all Australians that we are constantly focused on making sure that our resources are where they are most needed.

Will raised this matter at the last COAG in Hobart and the acting

Commissioner of the Federal Police Michael Phelan was there and Michael explained that the threat assessment in respect of Hobart had been some years ago and it remained the same. That it did not warrant AFP at the airport, from a threat point of view. That is the basis of the decision and we're guided by those experts in that regard.

Having said that we are doing a further review of all the security at all of our airports. We have enhanced security at our airports, including at Hobart, I might add. In some respects the public can see – will observe some changes, and other respects they won't.

So what happens is whenever we have an incident or a threatened incident, we take steps – look at that, we learn from that, and we will adapt.

That's the same with crowded places as Will and I have discussed at COAG and Will now has the final completed report. Which his police and all the state and territory police, and the federal police and other agencies have worked on, on crowded places, protecting crowded places from truck and vehicle attacks, like we saw tragically in Barcelona overnight.

So look all I can say to you is this; and just repeat is again, there is no room for set and forget. Every day, every hour my focus and that of any government is on keeping Australians safe. That's our first job. And we do so.

We've got great agencies and they do a great job, but we are not complacent. And we give them every support to do an even better job. That's why we are bringing the domestic security agencies at the Commonwealth level into the Department of Home Affairs. That is why we – why we have got Defence Force personnel here today. There is a brigadier and a team in Hobart today talking to the Tasmanian Police about providing special counter-terrorist training for your special response group, and we're providing that support to state police forces around Australia.

So, shortly I would expect that some of the Tasmanian special response team will be coming up to Holsworthy in Sydney, where they will go through very intensive counter-terrorism and tactical response training. So, to deal with – be able to deal with terrorists on the spot.

Again very important point to remember that the police that deal with these terrorist attacks are invariably the first responders. So, it is vitally important that we improve our – the capabilities of our – all of our police, because with these terrorists that are there, with a car, or with a gun, or with a knife, they need to be stopped, taken down as quickly as possible.

So, that's again – you can see I'm – there is no set and forget in my Government. So I've got – we will have the best counter-terrorism – in other words, Special Forces will be providing training to the Tasmanian police and they are here, the brigadier is here today with his team, talking to your police today, Will, to arrange all that.

So I can assure you – safety first. The safety of the Australian people is

what we are relentlessly committed to and focused on.

JOURNALIST:

How do you plan on reconnecting with the Tasmanian people in the lead-up to the next election, given the sort of jobs and growth platform didn't really resonate with Tasmanians last time?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well thanks for the editorial! We were having a very good discussion in the factory there and I can assure you that we're seeing actually in Tasmania strong economic growth. Look, Will's the Premier, he can talk about it.

JOURNALIST:

We get Will all the time though!

(Laughter)

PRIME MINISTER:

I know you get Will all the time, well let me tell you something, most of your exports are going to countries where we negotiated free trade agreements – China, Japan, South Korea.

The Coalition Government negotiated those. Labor was in – I don't want to introduce an unduly partisan note, but has an historical footnote, the Labor Party was in Federal Government for six years, didn't do any free trade agreements. Look at what we've achieved. And Tasmania is a big beneficiary.

And so you're seeing strong growth from exports, you're seeing strong economic growth here, Tasmania has had a very very tough economic time for a long time. And you've seen strong growth here, you are seeing over 9,000 more jobs over the last year. We want to see a lot more. And we're committed to it. This business is benefitting from our economic reforms. Every business is benefitting from our reforms, and you've got great opportunities in Tasmania and, above all, in this wonderful renewable and sustainable forest products industry.

JOURNALIST:

Surely the loss of three of your seats at the last election was a bit of a rude awakening? You must have some idea of where things went wrong?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well thank you again for a second political editorial. Let me say, we are very aware – we are very, very aware – of the need always to ensure that Tasmanians understand that we are working tirelessly to keep them safe, but also to ensure that they have great jobs and great opportunities and great economic opportunities. So whether it is exports, supporting business, supporting the forest products industry, supporting the Launceston City Deal

and the University of Tasmania here. I mean, right across the board, we're committed to growth in this great state.

Thank you all very much.

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