



Pulp Mill

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Fact Finding Trip to Finland

The Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry's Fact Finding delegation to Finland is due back in Tasmania early next week.

The ABC's Tim Cox aired an interview with the TCCI's Chief Executive Damon Thomas on the first part of the delegation's tour.

Here's an unedited transcript of the interview.

Damon Thomas – Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry

TIM COX: The Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry has a delegation looking at the pulp mills of Finland at the moment. The Chief Executive of the Chamber Damon Thomas is there and we know Bob Gordon the head of the Pulp Mill Task Force is there as well. It is now about 2:30am over in old Finland, but I spoke to Damon Thomas a couple of hours ago when it was just after midnight to ask where he was and to ask what they had seen so far.

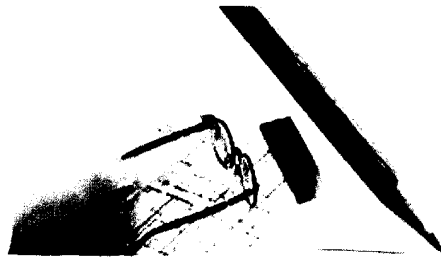
THOMAS: I am in a town called Lappeenranta which is about 100 kilometres away from Helsinki which is obviously Finland's capital city.

It is on the coast and it is a town of 60,000 people which is surrounded by hundreds and hundreds of little islands which can be owned privately or by the state, but under Finnish custom anyone is allowed to stop at an island and spend time there.

It is the way in which their social custom is, ownership cannot overrule community rights to enter and stay on places.

TIM COX: That is a bit different. So what sort of community is it and what sort of industry or agriculture sustains it?

THOMAS: Well the first industry that sustains it is the pulp and paper industry and many of the pulp mills have got a paper mill right next to the pulp mill.



That is the major industry and that sustains, we were told by the local Chamber of Commerce, somewhere between 20 and 30 per cent of the community and on top of that there is tourism and in this town of 60,000 they have at least 100,000 tourists per year.

We met with the local Council yesterday and also the Rotary Club and we had a fantastic hour where everyone spoke Finnish and we could not leave the room. But it is a very [inaudible] town and the pulp mill, the first pulp mill, is actually part of the town. It is surrounded by development and the other two pulp mills, which are within 35 kilometres, are surrounded by seaside homes and real estate development.

TIM COX: So your Finnish is no good, I gather?

THOMAS: It is not much good for other than 'thank you' and 'where is the toilet' and 'how much is the price of beer'.

TIM COX: Okay, so you are getting the basics. Tell me a little bit about the mill there. I spoke to Bob Gordon a bit about this before you all headed off. But what have you seen there?

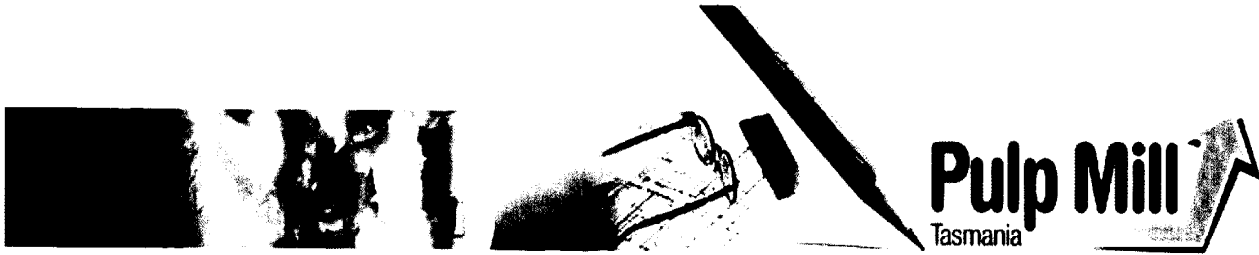
THOMAS: One mill we have visited so far. We have flown over the other two we are going to see today and tomorrow, is a mill that is run by the Botnia Group and that is a mill which we understand would be very similar to the mill that the Gunns proponent is planning to have in the Bell Bay area.

It is a mill which, for people's interests would be certainly no bigger than Norske Skog's mill in Boyer, a very modern mill although it has been there for nearly 100 years, it has had extensive renovation.

We went through the mill yesterday and it is spotless, that was the one thing I think can really identify this, that the one mill we have seen so far, is that it is absolutely 110 per cent clean.

The only smell that we were able to identify was a whiff of smell up near their recovery unit which is a large stack that discharges steam into the atmosphere and the only other time we had any smell of any of the mills was when we flew right over the stack of the mill that is right near the city.

Ten to 15 years ago these mills were very much, if you do not mind the pun, on the nose within the local community and people did get smells from emissions and they were seen as 'close your car windows, because we are heading into the area of the pulp mills'.



But right now we have asked locals, we have asked the Chamber of Commerce, we have been to the Rotary group, we have been everywhere and everyone says 'what are you here for,' 'are you here because you think the mills may be unpopular, well that is not the case'.

TIM COX: All right. How long have they been running there, not just on the current technology, but on the older technology you have mentioned as well? Is it something though that generations have grown used to?

THOMAS: The first mill was looked at in the very first couple of years of the 1900s, so the first mill started in 1909 and that was the mill we saw yesterday. But renovation after renovation after renovation has seen the current emanation of it.

TIM COX: So given that they are so used to it, I mean is there an expectation on your part or perhaps their part that in times to come we will as well here?

THOMAS: I think, it is interesting, we have a scientist, a professor from the University of Tasmania who made the interesting comment that in Finland they have grown up with pulp mills, they have lived amongst pulp mills all their lives and have seen the pulp mills improve and improve and improve.

In Tasmania we will, if there is indeed a mill in the northern part of Tasmania, come to that mill development.

Possibly there has been a perception that we are going to expect the worst and if it is a mill anything like what we are looking at then that will not be the case.

So we are going to start with a pre-conception that it is not going to be good, whereas here they have come from it not being good and now they are indeed well and truly accepted as part of the fabric of the local environment.

TIM COX: There has been some criticism, I am sure you are aware Damon, that the mills that you are looking at on this trip are predominantly pulping softwood. Is that comparable to what we will have in Tasmania. Are you seeing much in the way of hardwood go through as well?

THOMAS: There is only a little bit of hardwood that they put through, in actual fact timber resource is one of the most difficult problems for these mills.



They actually bring in part of their resource from Russia, bring it up the river from Russia through the canal system. But the reality is that, or what we have been told and again it is only what we are being told as a group that is primarily looking at, or myself and my chairman Michael Kent, looking primarily at the economic aspects.

We are being told that the hardwood and softwood differentiation is not a significant matter in terms of the environmental aspects.

TIM COX: Okay. So what is left on the agenda then and what is what you are seeing doing to your thinking on the pulp mill for Tasmania?

THOMAS: We came here primarily to get an understanding of some of the more social and the environmental and the fits that these pulp mills are in the community, because obviously Monash University and others have done studies. We have seen a very much integrated component of an industry within a local community tonight.

We actually are going out right near the mills and the funny thing is its Bob Gordon's 50th birthday, so we will actually be there to witness him going into the water.

I do not know how close we will go to a mill, but the reality is we have flown over them, we have walked around them and tonight we will actually lay off them.

The people here and again we are talking of a town with 60,000 people with 100,000 tourists, accept this particular industry as if it has always been there, as you have said and one that is not causing any significant, indeed, any issue.

The houses that are being sold, beach houses or saunas, are within about 150 metres, it is 200 metres to the nearest one at the Botnia mill and I noticed yesterday around 300 metres away was a marina.

Locals tell us that the house prices are exactly the same as house prices for residences a lot further down the river. Now we are only being told, we have asked a number of people and these are the answers and the story we get and of course we are expecting that the mill, if indeed there is one to be built in Northern Tasmania, will be built on exactly the same technology as the renovated mill yesterday, if not better.

TIM COX: Alright, we will hear plenty more about it when you get back, I will let you get some sleep though.



A letter from Finland.

Rod Wallis from the Government's Communications Unit – in Finland as part of the delegation filed this report shortly after his arrival.

When it comes to pulp mill technology, Scandinavia sets the benchmarks for technology.

Nowhere in the world do communities set higher quality-of-life standards.

This is the land of the Vikings. The way they used their timbers for sleek, seaworthy boats capable of travelling long distances across hostile oceans changed the history of the world.

In more modern times, Scandinavian furniture design and industrial technology has done the same.

How a pulp mill can fit into Finland's lifestyle offers some valuable guidance for Tasmania, where similar environmental requirements are a community expectation.

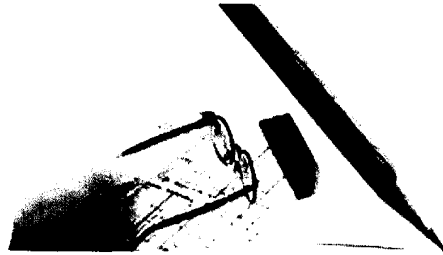
A delegation from the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Brand Tasmania and the University of Tasmania, is in Finland this week for a close look at how pulp mills operate, and how modern technology allows them to sit side by side in the urban landscape.

On arrival, I headed straight for Lappeenranta, a community just over the border from Russia which – I'm told - existed as a fortress town in Mediaeval times and traces its origins back 10,000 years.

As it happened, I arrived on "fish market" day with the waterfront on Lake Saimaa packed with people celebrating the arrival of Autumn with a market-place cook-up that drags in young and old from miles around.

Every second stall was fish. They were smoking them, canning them, pickling them, cooking them and eating them.

The centrepiece dish is a local speciality something like Tasmanian whitebait – a little fish the locals call Muikut (pronounced moo-ee-koo) that's tossed in flour and fried in butter or oil.



There must have been 20 or more stalls cooking up Muikut and barely managing to keep pace with the demand. In other places, people were queueing to buy fresh fish.

They're delicious. And they come from the lake that Lappeenranta is located on.

Why is that significant?

It's significant because these fish grow in the very same lake that's used by several pulp mills operating in Lappeenranta.

The mills draw their water from the lake and they discharge back into the same lake.

The locals catch and eat the muikut – and other fish that live in Lake Saimaa. The locals also swim in the lake and the harbour is chock-a-block with boats.

They are absolutely insistent that the pulp mills are clean and that the lake suffers no harmful ill effects from their operation.

It was an insightful introduction to how the pulp mills of Lappeenranta are accepted in this community.

A view down the main street of the town frames a pulp mill chimney stack. People here live, go to school and enjoy their weekends in close community with a number of pulp mills.

In the coming days of the delegation's visit to Finland, we'll be talking with community leaders, local citizens and the pulp mill industry to gauge how successfully they do that .

And at the end of the visit, a video documentary will be produced so that Tasmanians can see for themselves what we saw in Lappeenranta.



Mayoral Communique

The Mayors of George Town, Meander Valley, West Tamar and Northern Midlands issued a joint communiqué in support of the proposed pulp mill and the assessment process.

The Mayors of the West Tamar, Northern Midlands, George Town and Meander Valley councils wish to make a clear statement of support for the proposed pulp mill in northern Tasmania.

The Mayors agree that voters in the forthcoming local government elections are entitled to expect council candidates to clearly state their position in relation to the pulp mill proposal.

The signatories also agree that sitting Mayors have an obligation to provide strong leadership on matters of public importance – and the proposed pulp mill is undeniably a matter of public importance.

Northern Tasmania has enjoyed unprecedented employment and economic growth over the past five years. Our towns are booming. There are more jobs for our people.

A world class pulp mill, complying with the best overall environmental standards in the world will keep Northern Tasmania heading in the right direction.

To secure our future, Northern Tasmania requires strong leaders, capable of seizing opportunities when they arise.

This communiqué is a commitment by the Mayors of four northern municipalities to provide strong cooperative leadership for the region.



The Mayors agree on the following principles:

1. The Mayors support the construction of a pulp mill at Bell Bay provided it meets the environmental standards set by the Tasmanian Government's Environmental Emission Limit Guidelines for any new bleached eucalypt kraft pulp mill in Tasmania.
2. The Mayors have full confidence that a mill, complying with the emission guidelines, will be safe for the environment and for people.
3. The Mayors have full confidence in the Resource, Planning and Development Commission's capacity to expertly and thoroughly assess the environmental, social and economic impacts of the proposed pulp mill.
4. The Mayors have full confidence that the Project of State Significance approval process affords the community sufficient opportunity to express its views and is the most appropriate process for assessing the project.
5. The Mayors oppose the dissemination of deceptive, dishonest or misleading material by interest groups opposed to the pulp mill project.
6. Noting that the Centre of Policy Studies at Monash University estimates that a pulp mill project will generate an extra \$91 million a year in State and Commonwealth taxes, the Mayors request that significant funds are set aside for additional infrastructure in the northern region.
7. The Mayors wish to make clear the communiqué should be regarded as personal commitments by the signatories and is not binding on fellow councillors.
8. The Mayors encourage Gunns Limited to consider the addition of a paper mill at Bell Bay, should the proposed pulp mill proceed.
9. If re-elected, the Mayors undertake to work cooperatively in a non-parochial and non-partisan manner to maximise economic and social benefits for the entire region.

Barry Easter
West Tamar

Kim Polley
Northern Midlands

Doug Burt
George Town

Mark Shelton
Meander Valley