

Lilydale Public Meeting, 8th April 2008

A development application before the Launceston City Council (ref application DA0144/2008) caused a flurry of concern amongst Lilydale residents. Adjoining landholders were notified of the proposed subdivision of a prominent local farm and asked to comment on the proposal, but the concern went far wider than those neighbours immediately affected. This was because the purchaser of the farm was a plantation company Forest Enterprises Australia (FEA) who intended to establish a eucalyptus nitens plantation on the site.

A public meeting was called at very short notice, and held on April 8th 2008 at the Lilydale Memorial Hall to gauge public opinion.

1. Attendance

An attendance record was taken. This was signed by:

- 82 members of the local community
- 6 persons from adjoining areas
- Representation from the LCC comprising:
 - Mayor Albert van Zetten
 - Deputy Mayor Rosemary Armitage
 - Aldermen Ted Sands, Jeremy Ball and Ian Norton
 - Ian Abernethy, Director of Developmental Services
 - Frank Dixon, General Manager

2. Background and Scope

A pre-ambule was provided to the meeting to inform the community of what was known about this application and the location of the blocks in question.

Investigation of the application by concerned residents determined that:

- The South Lilydale property in question comprises three titles totalling (71.61Ha) on the North Eastern Slopes of Brown Mountain. This property is predominantly comprised of 'alpine' pasture and is clearly visible from most parts of the Lilydale locality.
- A large portion to the Southern end of the property is listed as a Scenic Reserve.
- The application is for a subdivision change reducing the current three titles to two comprising a small block including the residence (9.21Ha) and the remainder combined into one sizeable block (62.4Ha).
- Contact with an officer of FEA elicited the intention that this larger block was to be converted to an E. Nitens plantation.
- It is believed that the property sale and transfer is conditional on FEA obtaining the requisite permits to establish this plantation.

3. Summary of Discussion

The meeting was opened to the floor for questions and comments. Discussion covered the following broad topics. Issues raised and information supplied to the meeting is summarised under each heading:

3.1. The Planning Application and Community Submissions

- The current application being considered by the LCC is solely for the change in subdivision. The requirements for establishing a plantation would be dealt with by supplementary applications.
- Anyone wishing to comment on the application can lodge a submission, however that submission should address, in whole or in part, the proposed change in subdivision.
- The impact of the Scenic Reserve listing was extensively debated without clear resolution. Launceston Planning Scheme 1996 regulations (sect 41 Scenic Reserves) seems primarily concerned with urban areas. The regulation also contains specific exclusions for Forestry activities.

3.2. Visual Amenity

- Strong feelings were expressed by several contributors concerned that:
 - A monoculture plantation would negatively impact the appearance of the mountainside.
 - The current alpine pastures are a key aspect of the iconic landscape in the Lilydale valley and losing them would fundamentally impoverish the character of the area.
- These pastures are visible from almost all parts of the Lilydale valley and change in use would impact most residents.

3.3. Historical/Cultural considerations

The area of Brown Mountain has considerable historic and regional significance. Brown mountain is, along with Mt Arthur, an icon of the village of Lilydale. Part of its charm is the merging of farmland with native forest on the higher slopes. This natural bush has been under the care of one local family for three generations. Adjoining this bush is the Walker Rhododendron Reserve, at Lalla, an area designated as of Regional, Historic, Cultural and Scenic significance. Although privately owned this facility has been maintained by its custodians, and enjoyed by the Lilydale (and greater Launceston) community for over thirty years. The current owners are working to connect the two properties with a system of walking/riding trails, to create a 400 acre reserve for public enjoyment. They consider the proposed plantation an anathema to such a historic vision for the area.

3.4. Environmental Considerations

- The use of toxic chemicals. Plantation management practices typically involve the use of many types of pesticide. The meeting was informed of the use and potential consequences of:
 - 1080 baits used to kill off browsing animals. Poisoned animals are known to range over considerable distances before succumbing to the poison. The poison is persistent and can subsequently kill household pets that feed off the carcasses. Also, concern was expressed for wildlife (including wedge tailed eagles, known to nest in the forest upslope from the proposed plantation site).
 - The land is steep and the only application method for broad coverage of pesticides would be from the air (helicopter). This can lead to:
 - Contamination of waterways. Run-off and streams passing through the blocks empty directly into Rocky Creek which passes through the

village and is a vital source of water for downstream agricultural properties. Bores and wells close to plantations elsewhere have been contaminated (as expressed by Mr Carpenter of Wyena, owner of Red Rooster Host Farm, whose bore was contaminated as a result of Gunns aerial spraying in 2006).

- Overspray will almost certainly affect neighbouring properties. Two of these are organic farms, one certified and the other in the process of meeting certification standards. Overspray contamination would put these properties at significant commercial risk. Overspray would also likely affect the neighbouring high conservation forest upslope on Brown Mountain.
- Pesticides include endocrine disruptors (chemicals that adversely affect reproductive capability).
- Impacts on Water. An E. Nitens plantation straddling a significant area of water catchments on Brown Mountain is likely to result in:
 - Riverine contamination.(see above)
 - Siltation due to the destabilising of the soil following deep ripping.
 - Reduced water flows to downstream users due to the prodigious thirst of plantation species. It was noted that Rocky Creek had stopped flowing this summer for the first time in living memory.

3.5. Respect for the Wishes of the Current Owner.

It was noted that the current owner of the property had been unsuccessfully trying to sell for several years before receiving an offer from FEA (or their representatives). Sympathy was expressed for this unenviable situation.

The right of the owner to dispose of his assets in any way he sees fit was not challenged, however broader issues emerged concerning the difficulty in selling farming properties due to restrictions imposed by Council and State planning legislation. Specifically mentioned was the inability to subdivide large holdings into small holdings suitable for speciality and hobby farms. Lilydale already has many flourishing properties of this nature.

3.6. Community Impacts

A range of potential impacts on the community were aired, including:

- Reduction in value of neighbouring properties. Properties near plantations have proven 'harder to sell'.
- Loss of 'family farms'. Conversion of farms into plantations, should this prove to be the first of many would:
 - Reduce local employment in agriculture,
 - Impact the local economy by reducing the demand for local shops and services.
- Increased fire risk from trees close to other properties.
- Increased risk of road accidents due to difficult access to the block for heavy forestry traffic.

4. Vote

The meeting was asked at the end of the open discussion to make their views known in response to the following questions. (All attendees from outside the Lilydale community were asked to abstain.)

Do you wish the application before the LCC (DA0144/2008) to progress through to the establishment of a plantation? **Count 0**

Do you wish to oppose this application in the knowledge that the intention is to establish a plantation? **Count 83**

Abstentions. **Count 5**