

FACT & ACTION SHEET

THE TARKINE

SUMMARY: *In this F&A session, we will be discussing The Tarkine, which is an extensive area of rainforest and natural biodiversity in Tasmania. Although it has been described as “one of the world’s great archaeological regions”, The Tarkine is currently under threat from mining and forestry contractors.*

This month, we will be discussing, in-depth, the issues surrounding The Tarkine and actions we can take to persuade decision makers and MPs to prevent any further deforestation.

Background

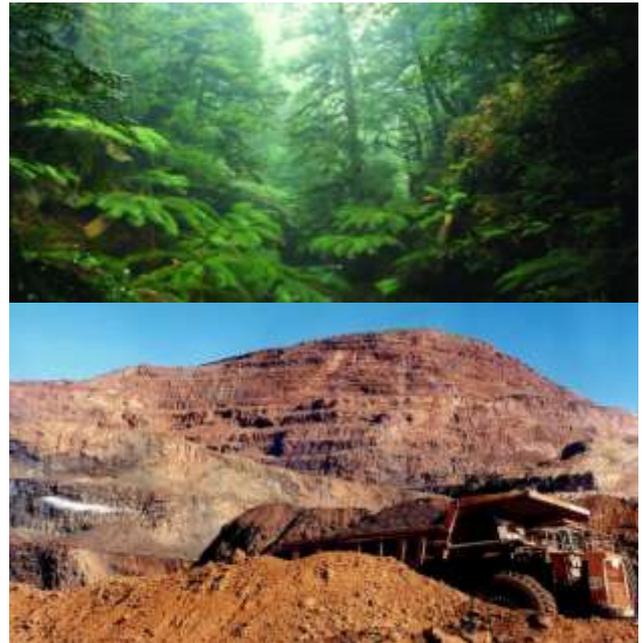


The Tarkine, located in north-west Tasmania, is the largest unprotected wilderness area dominated by rainforest, and holds a vast diversity of vegetation including woodlands, wetlands, plants and fauna. Importantly, The Tarkine contains many ancient Aboriginal sites and is the natural habitat for over 60 rare, threatened and endangered species of flora and fauna. Within the pristine wilderness of The Tarkine, rare animal species include wedge-tailed eagles (Australia’s largest eagle) and the last of disease-free Tasmanian devils.

Map of The Tarkine

Source: www.discoverthetarkine.com.au

The issue to be discussed in this F&A meeting is that the Tarkine is mostly controlled by Forestry Tasmania, which has allowed Mineral Resources Tasmania (both being State-controlled departments) to grant mining exploration permission licenses. At the present time, 80% of the Tarkine is protected from logging, but only 5% is protected from mining, which leave the area vulnerable to severe environmental threats. Currently, there are 2 mines operating in the Tarkine, and from 2012-2017, 10 new mines have been proposed, with 9 of them proposed as Pilbara-style open cut mines (as shown in the picture).



Adding to the threat is the fact that less than 5% of the Tarkine is protected as a National Park, which leaves it vulnerable to illegal poaching and arson.

Activity Number 1:

Watch Brent Melton's video "Tarkine – Saving the Last of Gondwana" on the tarkine.org site for a comprehensive summary of the issue.

<http://tarkine.org/> (scroll to the bottom of the page)

Activity Number 2:

Watch this video from the GetUp! Campaign, 'Tony in the Tarkine' which resulted in Federal Environment Minister Tony Burke visiting The Tarkine to experience the beauty of the landscape for himself.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r7NI2qNdEOs&feature=relmfu> or

<http://www.getup.org.au/campaigns/save-our-forests/save-the-tarkine/tony-in-the-tarkine>

Economic interests

To environmental and conservation groups, it is seemingly obvious that mining and logging activities will result in unwanted ramifications including deforestation, threatening of already vulnerable habitats and endangered species, as well as the potential for long-term adverse health effects due to mining activities, which may result in mineral leaching and water contamination. However, from the government's perspective, the incentive for granting mining exploration licences stems from a desire to boost the economic prospects of the Tarkine region, at least in the short term.

Tasmania's west coast and inland north-west region has a small permanent human population and a very small local economy. With the prospect of mining companies offering jobs in construction and operation for the local community, some have seen it as a path to a brighter future. However, to assume that these "benefits" will be long-term is short-sighted.

- Firstly, mining operations in the Tarkine region will mean that anything extracted from the land will be in the possession of the mining company who extracted it, and these profits will not be going back to the community.
- Secondly, mining activity will likely expand and continually destroy the region if the first few operations are deemed to be successful.
- Finally, mining and logging will not provide long-term economic solutions. Once these companies have depleted the regions of their valuable minerals, the local community will have to deal with the environmental and health consequences of their activities. For example, Queenstown, Tasmania, has been transformed to a barren landscape devoid of trees, with heavy metals continuing to leach out due to past mining booms. It would be tragic if the Tarkine were to have a similar fate.

Saving the Tarkine

We depend on healthy natural ecosystems for our health- we all need clean air, clean water, a stable climate, regular contact with nature and the biodiversity that nature provides to be truly well.

Ecosystems like the Tarkine protect our health:

- The Tarkine acts as a carbon sink, as trees absorb CO₂ and release O₂, which protects us against further climate change (a major global health threat).
- The large forests provide clean air and water, and soil protection from salinity and erosion.
- Providing a biodiverse ecosystem which acts as a buffer against climate threats. As many as 1/3 of all medicines have come from forests and there may be many more plants of potential medicinal and nutritional value in these diverse living systems.
- Spending time immersed in nature of high wilderness value is good for us both physically and mentally. Activities such as bushwalking, kayaking or swimming protect us from the many diseases associated with a sedentary lifestyle. Researchers have also found

that time in nature elevates mood, reduces anxiety and enhances focus, i.e. it makes people happier and less stressed.

- The vast expanse of the Tarkine means that tourism jobs are available for the local community, and provide a source of long-term employment in healthy environments.

Destruction of the Tarkine by mining will cause many adverse health and environmental effects:

- Deforestation and ecosystem alterations will lead to the redistribution of microorganisms and pathogens, which predisposes to the emergence of new infectious diseases, to which humans have had no prior immunity.
- Increased traffic, especially involving heavy, diesel-fuelled vehicles will cause local air pollution. The WHO has recently advised that diesel-fuelled engine emissions are carcinogenic, causing bladder and respiratory cancers.
- Mining activities will release thousands of tonnes of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, thus adding to climate change health impacts.
- The west coast of Tasmania receives heavy rainfalls, meaning that pollutant minerals from mining can easily leach out of the ground and into local river systems.
- Water contamination of the river systems will lead to the loss of fish and other aquatic food sources, thus potentially harming the health of people ingesting this heavy-metal laden seafood.
- The fabric of local communities will be torn by new workers brought in to live in mining camps rather than local towns. For example mining communities in the Pilbara region of Western Australia are troubled by high rates of alcoholism, drug use and associated violence. These social problems will be compounded by the lack of wilderness and the natural landscape for recreation and health.
- The destruction of sacred Aboriginal sites would cause distress to indigenous Tasmanians.

Action

Writing to MPs

Write to Tony Burke MP, Federal Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities.

PO Box 6022

Parliament House

Canberra, ACT 2600

Ph: (02) 6277 7640

It is particularly important to write to Minister Burke about The Tarkine and express that it must be preserved and protected from the commercial interests of mining and forestry companies.

- Recently, a GetUp! Campaign challenged Minister Burke to visit the Tarkine and experience for himself, the beauty of the natural landscape, before considering mining applications.
- In 2009, the Tarkine was listed as a National Heritage Area, but this listing has since lapsed. The deadline for re-assessing the Tarkine as a National Heritage Location is the end of 2013. This delay is unacceptable because it will only mean that the Tarkine will be unprotected for an unnecessarily long period of time, and thus become increasingly vulnerable to preliminary mining and logging activities.

For Tasmanian DEA members, write to Premier Lara Giddings to express the importance of protecting the Tarkine National Park.

The Premier, The Hon. Lara Giddings

Executive Building

Level 11, 15 Murray Street Hobart 7000

Ph: (02) 6233 3464

Email: lara.giddings@dpac.tas.gov.au

Raising awareness

Use your medical and health knowledge to link the future protection of wilderness to our own future as humans. Human health is intrinsically linked to the health of our natural environment. As we destroy more and more of it, through mining, forestry, pollution contamination and other damaging practices, we further increase the damage we inflict upon human wellbeing.

This is an important issue to speak about with family, friends, colleagues and people of the local community even outside of Tasmania. The Tarkine can be seen as a representative case of potential destruction of vast natural landscapes, leading to multiple adverse health and environmental outcomes.