

## **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT AS A TOOL FOR THE APPRAISAL OF PULP MILL PROPOSALS IN TASMANIA, AUSTRALIA**

*Emma Young, PhD Student, Graduate School of the Environment, Macquarie University, NSW, 2109 Australia.*

The pulp and paper industry has a long history of discharging toxic waste into aquatic systems. The resultant water pollution subsequently impacts adjacent coastal receiving environments. In British Columbia even low levels of bleached eucalypt kraft mill effluent have resulted in the fish tainting and the subsequent closure of four commercial shellfish operations (McLeay 1991; Reiter 1990).

In a review of chlorinated organics, the major pollutant from pulp mills, the Australian and New Zealand Environment Council (ANZEC 1991: 17) stated that chlorinated organics cause a variety of effects on aquatic biota. These include:

“histological change, metabolic, respiratory and behavioural effects, decreases in tolerance levels and primary productivity, growth and reproduction effects”

In order to minimise these impacts on the aquatic environment, there is a need for a greater emphasis on prediction and monitoring.

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is widely used in major development proposals and is the primary tool for identifying and prescribing measures to mitigate impacts on the environment. The nature of pulp mill operations, including the discharge of effluent, requires the use of EIA in order to assess these impacts.

This paper discusses EIA legislation and procedures at a National (Commonwealth of Australia) level and State, (Tasmanian) level. The proposal for an export bleached eucalypt kraft pulp mill at Wesley Vale, Tasmania in the late 1980s is used here as a case study in the analysis of Australian EIA procedures. This is followed by a discussion of Tasmanian pulp mill legislation and associated guidelines and their effectiveness in achieving progressive environmental management conditions.

This case study indicates that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) produced early in the development process rarely reflects the nature of a development when it nears completion. This may be the result of negotiations held between the proponents and relevant government agencies.

The Wesley Vale proposal showed major inconsistencies in the EIA process and the production of an EIS that was grossly inadequate and not in compliance with guidelines set out for its construction. This suggests a need for comprehensive EIA regulations for the pulp industry that must be followed without exception. As decision-making on this

issue is both a Commonwealth and State matter National regulations could lead to better integration and more effective implementation.

In Australia investigations of environmental impacts are restricted to the bleached eucalypt kraft pulping technology. This does not provide information on alternative technologies which may be more appropriate from an environmental point of view, and which would assist in the creation of regulations.

There is also an urgent need for extensive baseline data in relation to a pulp mill proposal of any scale in order to develop environmental standards with respect to each locality. The use of baseline data is a critical component in the monitoring process and should be a requirement under EIA legislation.

## **References**

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