

Logging law seen as a risk

ROGER HANSON

THE state's peak farming body is voicing doubts about the State Government's plan to open 356,000ha of forests to logging.

Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association chief executive Peter Skillern is seeking clarification on the Forestry Bill that has been debated in State Parliament.

Mr Skillern said "near constant changing of the goalposts" had done nothing to alleviate anxiety around sovereign risk in the industry.

Mr Skillern said TFGA members were concerned the Government had failed to articulate the reasoning behind its legislation, which opens to logging forests set aside for future reserves in the previous Labor government's forest agreement.

There are fears the move will re-ignite conflict over forestry in the state and jeopardise sustainable certification for timber products.

Mr Skillern said the Government had failed to bring the broader forest industry and the community onside.

"A better approach would

be to have bipartisan support for the forest industry and the policies within which it operates."

Mr Skillern emphasised the importance of a sustainable environment for private foresters to operate and expand their businesses.

"Unfortunately this government has ignored the TFGA's repeated requests that it undertake constructive discussions with the Opposition to achieve this," Mr Skillern said.

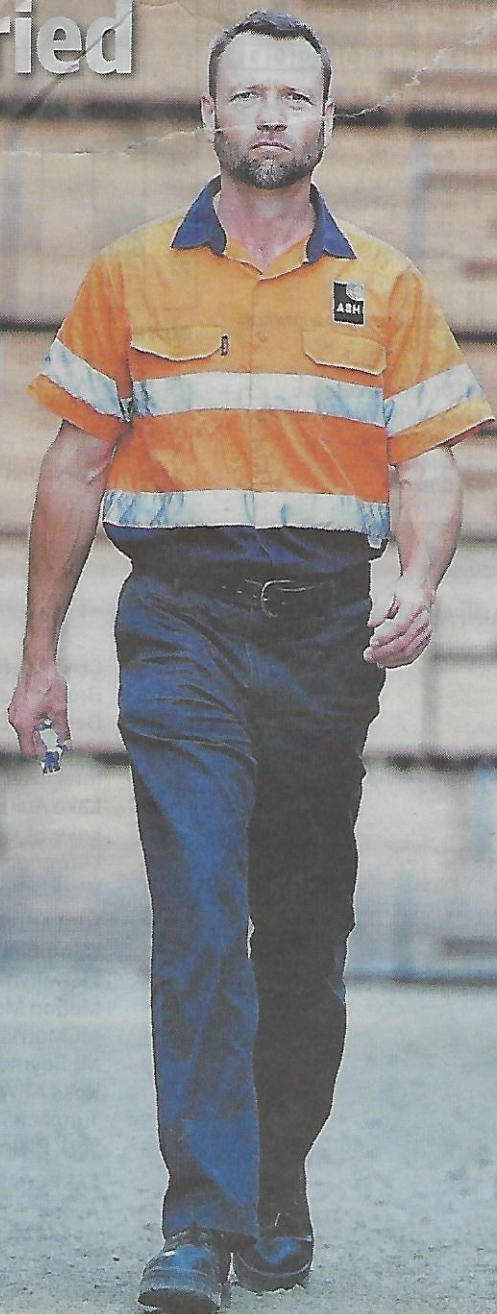
The Forest Industries Association of Tasmania says it cannot support the legislation.

Chief executive Terry Edwards said FIAT did not accept the Government's argument the legislation was needed to avoid 700 job losses in the industry through providing more supply to Forestry Tasmania.

Mr Skillern said TFGA members had significant reservations about the Bill.

"Ongoing investment within the private forestry sector requires stability and an assurance that governments of all persuasions recognise that, in order for the sector to remain strong, it requires certainty into the future," Mr Skillern said.

Sawmiller's state move queried



GREEN groups are calling for greater transparency from the State Government in its negotiations to lure a major Victorian sawmiller to Tasmania.

Australian Sustainable Hardwoods is in talks with the Government about relocating from Heyfield in Victoria to the state's North-West.

Tasmanian Greens leader Cassy O'Connor called for the Government to reveal the exact nature of discussions to date and whether public subsidies were "in the mix".

ASH plans to close its mill by September 2018, with 260 workers told last week they would lose their jobs. Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews had offered to buy the mill if ASH didn't want to run it but the company rejected the offer.

Former Greens leader Bob Brown believes the rejection and the possible relocation are "more than a hint at Tasmanian Government involvement".

Mr Brown said Heyfield's closure coincided with a push by the Tasmanian Government to open 365,000ha of additional forests for logging.

The Wilderness Society says increasing interest in Tasmanian plantation timber should put the brake on the Liberals' plan to sell some Forestry Tasmania plantations. Under the Government's plans for FT, its pulpwood plantations will be put up for sale but sawlog plantations will be retained.

Wilderness Society spokesman Vica Bayley ASH's potential relocation to Tasmania to process low-grade plantation logs into sawn timber products signalled a significant technological development. ASH boss Vince Hurley said on Hobart radio his company's focus was on plantations.

STEPS ACROSS THE STRAIT:
ASH chief executive Vince Hurley at the Heyfield mill.