

Review of Code of Practice for the Use of 1080 Poison for Native Browsing Animal Control

Submission by Forest Industries Association of Tasmania

Executive Summary:

The continued access to 1080 for wildlife population management and the protection of crops, in the absence of any other viable alternative, is absolutely essential for Tasmania's forest industry. The following FIAT submission to the review of the Code of Practice proceeds from this basis and previous assurances that there is no Government intention to phase out the use of 1080 until a viable and economic alternative exists.

Tasmania's forest industry is very much aware, and conscious of, the community concern with respect to the use of 1080, however, it has responded to these concerns and has heeded the advice of the current Government by reducing its reliance upon 1080. Over the past five years the industry has made significant inroads into developing and fostering the use of professional shooters and hence, as a consequence, a noticeable decrease in the use of 1080 poison has been observed (credit for which, we note, has been taken by the government!). The reduction also recognises and is as a result of the extensive research into alternative means of browsing animal damage control, much of which has been directly funded by the forest industry.

This reduction, albeit voluntarily achieved by the forest industry, has come at a considerable additional cost to the companies involved.

The proposed changes to the Code of Practice for the use of 1080 are regarded as draconian measures which WILL result in a loss of investment in Tasmania and are unnecessarily severe given the air of good-will, and commitment to explore alternatives, that currently exists within the industry.

FIAT therefore calls upon the Government to stand by the commitment made by Minister Green in late 2003 that, notwithstanding the Tasmania Together benchmarks, 1080 will be retained in Tasmania in the absence of a commercially viable alternative (copy of letter attached).

As a consequence, the Forest Industries Association of Tasmania (FIAT) is tempted to reject the proposed changes to the Code of Practice in their entirety however we believe that our previous position of continuing meaningful dialogue with the Government on this issue should continue in the prospect that we may be able to convince the Government to apply a more pragmatic and economically sensible approach to this vexed issue.

Further, the forest industry calls upon the Tasmanian Government to implement a Game Management Plan for the State which recognises the Government's role in ensuring the management of native animal populations that are in virtual plague proportions and that cause extreme damage to Tasmania's forest and rural industries.

Overview and Background:

Need for overall game management plan for the state is being ignored

The forest industry in Tasmania believes that the Tasmanian Government are ignoring their responsibilities when it comes to the population management of native animals that are in abundant numbers. Tasmania is quite unique when compared to many other developed states/nations in that it does not regulate the numbers of abundant species and it has no overall "Game Management Plan" for the State. This neglect has resulted in extremely numerous populations of various species including many that damage crops through browsing. In many cases some of these species are in virtual plague proportions.

We understand that the Government's own Research and Demonstration Station at Elliott is suffering pasture losses calculated at a cost of \$300 per hectare per annum through browsing animals eating the pasture land. This is a demonstration of actual profit which is being lost to the Tasmanian agricultural industry at present. This is a loss that many simply can't bear.

This is a demonstration of potential cost which would be even higher in the circumstances of a more valuable crop such as a plantation seedling.

FIAT calls upon the Tasmanian Government to implement a Game Management Plan for the State, which recognises the Governments responsibility in ensuring the management of native animal populations that are in abundant numbers.

At the present time the responsibility and cost of population management is being borne by private landowners and for many landowners this is a cost that they simply cannot bear ad infinitum especially given that this is a social issue that should be redressed by action sponsored in whole or in part by the public purse and should not be visited onto individual landowners.

The lack of responsibility being shown by the State Government is reflected in the amount of money that has been expended directly by the Government into exploring alternatives to the use of 1080 for population and browsing control. The contribution into research for alternative methods of browsing control by the State Government is wholly insufficient given the gravity of this issue and its direct threat to investment and economic activity within the State.

Considerable additional cost is being borne by industry

The private forest industry, on the other hand, has spent an estimated \$1.5-2 million over the past three years researching alternatives to the use of 1080, protecting crops and managing population numbers using a range of measures including trapping, shooting, guarding, repellents and poisoning.

The money expended on shooting by one company alone (as an alternative and/or supplementary form of population management and browsing management) has risen from \$200K in 2001/2002, to \$520K in 2002/2003, to over \$1M (YTD) in 2003/2004. This increased effort and expenditure has been spent voluntarily and in the absence of excessive and overbearing regulations such as those proposed in the draft Code of Practice. We will

collate aggregated numbers from other FIAT members and forward those to you to provide a more complete picture of this expenditure on an industry wide basis.

The extent of the population problem is still not recognised by government

The Tasmanian Government must be willing to recognise the extent of the problem being faced by Tasmanian industry with respect to population management and the subsequent browsing damage inflicted upon crops.

Over the past two years, one organisation alone has shot in excess of 100,000 animals in the State in order to manage the numbers of overabundant native wildlife and to protect its crops from these browsing animals. This figure defies belief and yet it simply reflects the huge numbers of these animals that are present in the State and emphasises, once again, that the State Government has neglected and is continuing to neglect its responsibilities to Tasmanian landowners by not actively managing the populations of these abundant species.

As a further example of the problem faced by this lack of population management the following examples are provided:

- 135 hectare property at Chudleigh (no 1080 used)
 - In an eight (8) month period in excess of **1,304 animals** were shot or trapped in order to facilitate the establishment of a forestry crop. (\$18,500 was spent on treatment and yet 10% damage was sustained across the property resulting in an additional \$13,500 spent on re-establishment of 10% loss)
- 335 hectare property at Blessington (1080 & shooting)
 - In an eight (8) month period in excess of **2,424 animals** were shot or trapped in order to facilitate the establishment of a forestry crop. (\$50,000 was spent on treatment and yet 10% damage was sustained across the property resulting in an additional \$33,500 spent on re-establishment of 10% loss)
- 470 hectare property at St.Mary's (no 1080 used)
 - In an eight (8) month period over **12,929 animals** were shot or trapped in order to facilitate the establishment of a forestry crop. (\$77,000 was spent on

treatment and yet 5% damage was sustained across the property resulting in an additional \$23,500 spent on re-establishment of 5% loss)

These examples demonstrate clearly that notwithstanding the extensive use of alternative (and expensive) game control mechanisms there remains a significant threat to seedlings from browsing damage. We therefore say that it is inappropriate in these circumstances for the introduction of what can only be called excessive regulation that is only generated by a political not a scientific imperative. To knowingly allow the wholesale destruction of privately owned crops without reasonable access to effective game control through ready access to an effective poisoning regime will cause considerable hardship to both the forestry and farming industries.

The Government appears to believe that increased use of shooting will provide some form of solution to the current emotive debate within some sectors of the Tasmanian community however recent media commentary suggests that this magic pill may be little more than an expensive placebo. By way of demonstration we have attached hereto two recent articles from the Hobart *Mercury* that make it quite clear that shooting will not be regarded by the principal opponents of 1080 as any form of acceptable alternative game management strategy. Given this obvious continued opposition the increased regulation with its consequent increased levels of sustained damage to crops can only be seen as a wasteful and highly expensive flirtation that will not provide any long term benefits political or economic.

FIAT has previously corresponded to your predecessor Minister Bryan Green in respect to proposals that we believed would act to make shooting more effective. Regrettably we have never received any response to this correspondence despite having raised the issue with DPIWE Officers on a number of occasions. The issues we believe would act to improve the success of a shooting regime are the utilisation of silencers and night scopes. We fully understand the sensitivity of these propositions however we believe a capacity to employ such devices at least by “contract” shooters would provide considerable increase in the effectiveness of shooting regimes which may allow a further reduction in the use of 1080 for browsing animal control

It must be noted that the problems caused as a consequence of the huge population numbers of these abundant species is not limited to forestry crops and that the agricultural sector faces just as great, or greater, problems as a consequence of the plague proportions of these browsing species.

No doubt, one of the reasons that many farmers struggle to make a living from farming in Tasmania is because their profits are literally being eaten by animals that are in overabundant numbers and that the State Government refuses to acknowledge the role it must play.

Proposed changes to draft code of practice WILL result in a loss in investment in Tasmania

The forest industry in Tasmania expends in the order of \$50 Million annually on the establishment of plantations in order to develop plantations which will underpin its future resource and will underpin the develop of significant downstream processing and further value adding infrastructure for example the construction of a pulp mill in Tasmania.

Total direct employment in Tasmania's forest industry is estimated to be in excess of 10,693 people and with considerable pressure being applied to the State's native forest resource the industry is increasingly reliant upon the plantation resource to secure growth within the industry. As at May 31st, Gunns employed 400 contractors and engaged over \$25M worth of machinery in plantation establishment alone – just another example of the substantial contribution that the industry makes to the State.

The value in today's dollars of the resource created from one year's establishment is equal to **\$500 million** to the State value added in the future.

The proposed changes to the Code directly threaten that investment in this State.

It would be remiss of FIAT not to make the Government aware that several of it's members have already stated that if the measures proposed in the draft review of the Code of Practice for the use of 1080 are adopted they will relocate future investment away from Tasmania to other mainland states where such restrictive measures do not exist.

The Tasmania together Target

The Tasmania Together process developed a target for the progressive reduction in the reliance by primary and secondary industry on chemical use and developed a benchmark for the progressive decline in the use of 1080 in accordance with the following table: -

5. Reduce reliance on chemical use by primary, secondary and tertiary industry and the domestic sector	5.1	Levels of usage of 1080 (1) 1998/99: 15.409 kg 1999/2000: 15.151 kg Source: DPIWE	2005: 50% reduction 2010: 75% reduction 2015: 100% reduction 2020: Maintain	Rationale: The continued use of 1080 is not acceptable. However, time is needed to develop viable alternatives to 1080 and phase it out in a non-disruptive way. In choosing the level of use of 1080 as an indicator against this standard, the benchmarking committee did not consider it the most relevant, but one for which data was readily available. Recommendation: Figures for usage of 1080 should be included in the environmentally toxic chemicals index once it is developed. (See 5.3)
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Since the publication of the benchmarks the Tasmania Together progress Board have reported on the progress towards the achievement of this goal with the most recent being in August 2003 an extract of which appears below: -

STANDARD 5 • Reduce reliance on chemical use by primary, secondary and tertiary industry and the domestic sector.

INDICATOR 24.5.1	Levels of usage of 1080 (1) 1999/00 15.151kg <i>Source Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment</i>
TARGETS	2005 50% reduction 2010 75% reduction 2015 100% reduction 2020 Maintain
PREVIOUS DATA	2000-01 12.69 kg
LATEST DATA	2001/02 9.57 kg (36.84% reduction on baseline)
COMMENTS ON DATA	1080 poison usage has decreased over the past few years due to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a short term reduction of the number of hectares planted to forestry; • improvement in and the implementation of other forms of control in the forestry industry where ever possible; and

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • further implementation of alternative control methods such as fencing by the agriculture sector. <p>Levels of 1080 usage may increase in the future, if forestry seedling plantations increase.</p>
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This report clearly demonstrates the efforts made by particularly the forest industry in voluntarily reducing its utilisation of 1080 without the need for the imposition of restrictive and economically damaging strictures such as those proposed by DPIWE in the current draft of the revised Code of Practice.

We observe in passing that the comment about a short term reduction in the number of hectares planted to forestry within this report do not accord with known data that in fact suggests that during this period the establishment of plantations within the State has occurred at a significant rate.

We have previously advised the then Minister, Bryan Green by correspondence dated 3 September 2003 of a further reduction in utilisation by the forest industry from 5.00 kg in 2001/02 to 4.99 Kg in 2002/03 but with a significant increase in the number of hectares managed. In 2001/02 the rate of treatment was 0.23 Kg/ha falling to 0.15 Kg/ha in 2002/03. This reduction per hectare usage further demonstrates that the forest industry has actively pursued and employed alternatives to the use of 1080 in managing browsing damage. We understand that in the same period the utilisation rate by the farming community has increased.

The use of alternatives has come at a considerable cost not only in the form of the actual costs of those alternative programs but also in the form of cost associated with crop loss due to less effective browsing management.

We say that this data provides clear demonstration that the existing benchmark that only measures crude usage rates is deficient as it fails to measure the effect of increased economic

activity on usage rates. We are certain that it is not the policy of the Government to achieve the 1080 reduction target at the expense of encouraging a high level of economic activity and consequent employment. This position appears to conflict with a number of other Tasmania Together benchmarks and also appears to be at odds with the best interests of the State.

We say that the Tasmania Together benchmark is in need of revision to make it a more appropriate gauge of utilisation rates with a capacity to recognise the effect of reductions and increases in economic activity and perhaps even climatic conditions.

FIAT therefore calls on the Government to join with it to request the Tasmanian Together Progress Board to review the benchmark with the objective of providing a superior measure of the actual usage of 1080 that encapsulates any increase or decrease in the level of economic activity that attracts the annual usage rates reported. There is no harm in the measurement of total usage however additional data needs to be correlated that permits the measurement of underpinning economic activity as a meaningful qualitative measure to supplement and rationalise the quantitative data already collected and reported.

Comments on the Revised Code

FIAT wish to put a number of issues before DPIWE and the Minister as part of the consultation process in the review of the Draft Code of practice for the Use of 1080 Poison for Native Browsing Animal Control.

We will comment on those areas of the Code where we hold concerns and highlight what those concerns are and offer any alternative that we may wish considered. In taking this approach we are conscious of earlier advice received from DPIWE that all comments made throughout the BDMG technical discussion process. Given that a number of suggestions coming from the technical reference group have not been incorporated in to the last draft of the Code and to ensure that our response is comprehensive we will deal with all issues arising as it may be necessary for this document to be used in other venues that will not have the benefit of having participated in the BDMG processes.

Changes to the Code that are not commented upon within this submission may be regarded as having been accepted by the forest industry as being reasonable amendments designed to achieve efficiency and an improved Code.

FIAT would now like to make specific comment on the proposed changes to the Draft Code of Practice:

Issue of permits to use 1080

- 3.2 The sentence that reads “The authorized officer is required to undertake an on-site inspection before issuing a permit.” needs to be removed from this clause.

It was discussed and agreed at the Browsing Damage Management Group, with Alex Schaap present, that once the applicant was able to provide the authorized officer with evidence that the requirements in Clause 3.1 are met, a permit would be issued as a matter of course, without question, within 24 hours of the request. A 24 hour turn around on these requests is absolutely crucial due to the fact that other control methods have been tried and are not working, therefore the crop will have sustained an unacceptable level of damage and any further delay will result in additional damage, and therefore impact adversely on the economic viability of the planting.

- 3.4 Forest plantations must be considered as high value crops.

- 3.6 The second dot point in this clause refers to the use of contract shooters for forestry crops. FIAT does not accept the differentiation in the requirements with respect to shooters between forestry crops and agricultural crops. We believe that the word “contract” should be removed from this clause so that the requirement will be for an appropriately trained shooter in all situations.

- 3.7.1 The requirement that the repeat use of 1080 at or adjacent to the same site within a three year period is unacceptable to the forest industry. There are many occasions where plantations will be established on adjacent properties within a three year period and these are likely to require protection from browsing animals as population

numbers recover from a poisoning event within months in many instances. If alternative measures are not working or are not feasible repeated use on the same site is essential.

We note in this regard that in respect to softwood plantations of *P radiata* current industry experience is that ring barking of trees is continuing to cause damage through to age 5 which will require subsequent treatments of 1080 as shooting is not practicable due to the height of seedlings.

The industry agrees that evidence will need to be provided to show that there is a risk or that an unacceptable level of damage is being sustained prior to a permit being issued in these cases as is the case for any poisoning operation. If browsing is being monitored and shown to be increasing, whilst shooting has been occurring, then repeat use of 1080 must be allowed.

Notification of Use

- 5.1 Notification should be to neighbours within 500 metres as is in the current Code, and not 1000 metres as proposed in the new Code. This proposal places an unnecessary and unreasonable administrative cost on the Applicant for little or no gain. There is no demonstrated basis for the enlargement of the notification area and this proposal will in all likelihood only increase unnecessarily the public nervousness about the use of 1080 and thereby the public rancour.

Under the proposed 1000m notification rule, in the case of a 100 hectare plantation, which is not uncommon, over 700 hectares will require notification. The current 500 metres should remain unchanged.

- 5.2 In this clause permit holders should provide details of control measures that have been applied prior to being granted a permit to use poison. FIAT agree with this requirement, however we would like to see the wording changed to “...provide details of *which* control measures....”.

Laying of 1080 Poison Baits

- 6.2 “Appropriate training” needs to be defined. The forest industry believe that the current training course that is run by DPIWE is adequate and that people who have completed this course should be able to train other members in their organisation to the required standard. It would be highly expensive to require additional training of all personnel associated with 1080 application and we believe the existing course along with in-house teach out would be adequate.
- 6.3 “At the discretion of the Competent Officer” should be removed on the basis that if a person has been deemed to have received the appropriate training and is able to meet the requirements of the Secretary, then they must be competent to lay the poison.
- 6.5 There is reference made to picnic areas and recreational sites. This term is far too broad. For example all of State Forest is multiple use which includes recreational use – does this mean that the use of 1080 would no longer be allowed on State Forest? If this dot point is to remain within the Code then a list of registered public picnic areas and public recreational sites will need to be provided as a appendix to the Code.
- Provision will also need to be made to allow for the closure of such sites in order for operations to occur failure to provide this will lead to extensive uncontrolled browsing which in many case will render a site unsuitable for economic development
- 6.6 If this clause is to remain in the Code then there will also need to be an appendix identifying the non-target species to which the clause will apply as well as a map identifying known threatened species habitat so that investors can be aware of the risks associated with establishing a plantation in these areas. There must be certainty provided to avoid decisions being taken that subsequently are unable to be implemented solely on the basis of vagueness in the Code.

The use of 1080 in areas where there is known habitat of non target species potentially at risk from 1080 poison should only be restricted if the general population of the species is at risk not the immediate local population.

Post-poisoning Precautions

7.3 As with clause 5.1 the forest industry believe that the 1000 metre carcass collection zone is unreasonable and should be reduced to 500 metres. As mentioned previously, a 100 hectare coupe would produce a 700 hectare search area this is highly expensive and an unreasonable requirement.

A suggested alternative to this is that if a carcass is found on a neighbouring property, the applicant, if requested, must retrieve that carcass and dispose of it in accordance with the Code without the imposition of a search requirement.

Definitions

8.4 The “Appropriately Trained Person” needs to delineate the appropriate training that is required.

Interim Standard Protocols for Damage/Risk Assessment and Shooting Effort

1. Damage Assessment (Crop/Pasture has been planted)

Forestry Crops

- ***Forest Plantation***

FIAT would like to see the words “as per the damage assessment protocol” included at the end of the first dot point for the purposes of clarity as a number of industry members have misinterpreted this provision during the consultation phase..

2. Risk Assessment (Crop is yet to be planted)

In the proposed Code there must be a minimum of 50% carrot uptake during the first free feed. The forest industry insists that this be reduced to 30% as was discussed with technical experts at the Browsing Damage Management Group.

3. Minimum Required Shooting Effort.

We insist that the second dot point changed to read “A total of either 5 hours, or 1 hour per 20 hectares, whichever is **less**”.

Conclusion

FIAT strongly request that the view we have expressed in this submission be used to guide the further processes of this review. The economic situation that underpins the importance of this industry is vital to Tasmania and we say that any actions that undermine the situation that encourages further investment will not be in the best interests of the State as a whole.

The further establishment of plantations and the protection of that investment will be a vital issue to be contemplated in the feasibility study as to whether or not a world-class pulp mill can be established in Tasmania.

The effective management of browsing animals is a vital component of this investment strategy.