



South East Region Conservation Alliance Inc

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MEDIA RELEASE: THIRD TIME LUCKY FOR WOODCHIPPERS. PELLET PLANT APPROVED FOR EDEN.

It was third time lucky for the woodchipping industry on 8th February 2012 when the Bega Valley Shire Council voted overwhelmingly to approve a wood pellet plant at the Eden woodchip mill.

Conservationists have bitterly opposed the project since it was first proposed a year ago. Councillors voted 6 - 2 in favour of the pellet plant, the first of its kind to use native forest wood.

“The woodchipping industry views this as a lifeline to a new future in so-called ‘renewable’ energy production,” according to Prue Acton speaking on behalf of the South East Region Conservation Alliance (SERCA).

“With traditional markets for native forest woodchips crashing, the Industry is desperately looking to energy production to broaden its economic base and replace some of the income lost from woodchip importers in Japan.”

The Council decision comes as a major disappointment to environment groups which have fiercely opposed the pellet plant at every stage of its approval.

Four conservationists addressed the Council meeting today, but their scientific and local knowledge, plus a petition signed by 750 ratepayers opposing the pellet plant were ignored.

After the first approval by the Council in June last year, South East Forest Rescue Inc. appealed successfully to the Land and Environment Court, which declared it invalid in December 2011.

A second attempt to have it approved was thwarted in January when reports on noise and emissions were omitted from the information provided to Councillors.

“We learned today that there was negotiations continuing between Council staff and the Environment Protection Authority on the chipmill’s behalf right up to this morning, with approval finally granted today under conditions to be determined ‘post consent’.”

While Council officers have described this as “normal”, conservationists are not satisfied.

“If it is ‘normal’, I am surprised they didn’t recommend this condition last June or in January on the 2 previous occasions it went to Council,” said Ms Harriet Swift, who also spoke on behalf of SERCA.

Conservationists are determined to continue their struggle against the pellet plant and are considering legal and other options which may remain.

“This is too important to give up on. Woodchipping started with just 5,000 tonnes for 5 years and is now regularly topping a million tonnes a year. The pellet industry could take its place if we are not careful,” she said.

While the woodchipping industry may be viewing this as its saviour, this is against a background of Australia’s biggest plantation based pellet producer, Plantation Energy of Albany (WA) closing its doors a week ago.

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