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Nominated for the Public Eye Award 2006 in
the category:

E N V I R O N M E N T

Nominated by: Milieudefensie Amstelveen,
Netherlands

GUNNS Limited

Headquarters:	Launceston, Tasmania, Australia
Branch of trade:	timber, wood chip
Turnover/ Net profit 2004:	AU\$ 6,7 billion / AU\$ 105 million
CEO:	John Gay
Owned by:	Publicly-traded corporation
Employees:	n/a
WEF-Participant 2006:	not officially enrolled

Summary

Milieudefensie Amstelveen accuses the world's biggest exporter of hardwood chips, the Australian group Gunns Ltd., of destroying Tasmania's old-growth forests. Unswayed by a large majority of Australians who want to protect Tasmania's natural heritage, the company continues to convert ancient forests into wood chips. In an attempt to crush dissent and silence its critics, Gunns filed a lawsuit against 20 campaigners who oppose the destruction of these forests. Milieudefensie Amstelveen demands that Gunns stop logging in ancient Tasmanian forests and cease its suppression of free speech.

Information on the case and characteristics of irresponsible corporate behaviour

Tasmania's ancient forests are seriously threatened by a wood chip industry which reduces them to throw-away paper products. These forests contain giant eucalyptus trees, some of the tallest hardwood trees in the world, and are home to many endangered species.

The Australian corporation Gunns Ltd. controls 85% of the logging in Tasmania. As the world's largest exporter of hardwood chips, it exports over four million tonnes of ancient forest wood chips every year (mostly to the Japanese paper industry) with more than 65% sourced from high-conservation value forests. In order to increase its production of wood chips, the company is planning to build a new AU\$1 billion-plus pulp mill in Northern Tasmania. This project threatens to intensify the logging rate of ancient forests.

The massive clearance of ancient forests is an ecological disaster. A large majority of Australians (85% according to a news poll in January 2004) have recognized this fact and want Tasmania's forests protected. For more than 20 years, the local community, together with environmental

The deadline for the submission of the nominations was August 26th 2005. Later developments were considered in the summaries as far as known.

groups, have been involved in a fierce battle against this senseless destruction. They held protest marches, set up blockades, and informed Japanese customers and investment banks about the threats to Tasmanian forests and wildlife. In November 2003, a Global Rescue Station was erected on 65 meter treetops in the Styx Valley to draw worldwide media attention to the uncontrolled destruction of Tasmania's forests.

Having lost the public debate in Australia on ancient forest protection, Gunns is now using its wealth and power to crush dissent and silence its critics. In December 2004, Gunns launched civil proceedings against 17 individuals and 3 organisations now called "The Gunns 20". The company accuses the defendants -- including a 60-year-old grandmother, the Wilderness Society of Australia, and Green Party leader, Senator Bob Brown -- of disrupting its business through grassroots action and blackening its name through "corporate vilification". Gunns is seeking AU\$ 6.3 million (US\$ 4.8 million) in damages. In July 2005, the defendants celebrated a partial victory when the Supreme Court in Victoria ordered Gunns to file a "radically rewritten" claim. According to the court, the original claim was "ambiguous", "unintelligible" and "in some parts embarrassing". In the meantime, a revised version has been presented to the court.

Consequences

The logging activities of Gunns are destroying native forests which are unique in the world for their flora and fauna. The lawsuit against campaigners defending Tasmanian forests is a serious attack on the freedom of speech and democratic liberties.

Current status and demands

The trial against "The Gunns 20" group is still underway. The defendants and other campaigners are travelling across Australia on The Forests and Free Speech National Tour to tell the public about their experiences working to safeguard ancient forests and about the lawsuit filed by Gunns.

Friends of the Earth, Milieudefensie Amstelveen demands that Gunns:

- withdraw its lawsuit against "The Gunns 20" and respect the freedom of speech;
- stop logging in Tasmania's ancient forests;
- abandon its plans to construct a new pulp mill in Tasmania which poses a serious threat to remaining forests.

Detailed nomination: www.publiceye.ch/nominierungen

Further information and links:

- www.gunns20.org
- www.wilderness.org.au