
[Australia: Nippon paper to go green in Tasmania and elsewhere?](#)

Between 17 June and 19 July 2005, Nippon Paper Group is asking for comments and suggestions on its draft "Philosophy and Basic Policy" on obtaining raw material for its pulp and paper mills. The company claims to be "engaging in a dialogue with stakeholders" and promises to publish responses to comments in September 2005 at the same time it publishes its "Philosophy and Basic Policy".

Formed in 2001 through the merger of Nippon Paper Industry and Daishowa Paper Manufacturing, the Nippon Paper Group is Japan's largest pulp and paper company. It has 22 mills in Japan and operations in Australia, Canada, Chile, China, Finland, New Zealand, Russia, South Africa and the US. Sales in 2004 amounted to more than US\$11 billion.

Nippon Paper has a Charter on the Environment, titled, "Sustainable Corporate Activities in Harmony with Nature". The company has a Corporate Social Responsibility Committee. It has subcommittees on Corporate Ethics, Social Contribution, Raw Materials and Environment, among others. It produces regular Environmental Reports and last year it produced a Sustainability Report.

Looking at all this, Nippon Paper could be an environmental organization rather than a massive pulp and paper corporation. But a look at what the company actually does reveals a different story.

Every year, Nippon Paper imports 1.6 million tonnes of woodchips from Tasmanian woodchip giant Gunns Ltd. Part of the timber to make the woodchips comes from highly destructive logging operations in Tasmania's ancient forests. Meanwhile, industrial tree plantations in Tasmania have dried up swamps, streams and rivers. Pesticide and herbicide use is high and water supplies downstream of the plantations have been poisoned.

As a result of pressure from the Wilderness Society and Greenpeace, another Japanese corporation which buys woodchips from Tasmania, Mitsubishi, has promised not to buy woodchips from ancient forests. Last year Mitsubishi agreed to "switch to secondary and plantation forests [sic] for woodchip sources as soon as possible".

Nippon Paper stated that it believes that the destruction of Tasmania's forests is "sustainable forest management". Tahiko Miyoshi, Nippon Paper's president, in a letter to Tasmanian premier, Paul Lennon and Gunns, said that it is regrettable that Nippon Paper was being pulled into the debate. Miyoshi urged Lennon and Gunns to resolve the matter locally.

In 2003, Nippon Paper stated that by 2008, all its imported hardwood chips will be from "certified trees or planted trees". The company aims to have 110,000 hectares of industrial tree plantations overseas by 2008. In Australia, Nippon Paper has a total of more than 60,000 hectares of eucalyptus plantations, including WA Plantation Resources, a joint venture with Marubeni. Two years ago, Nippon Paper started importing woodchips from Volterra's 13,500 hectares of eucalyptus plantations in Chile. Volterra is a joint venture between Nippon Paper and Sumitomo Corporation, set up in 1991. Nippon Paper also imports woodchips from Forest Resources (Forestco) in South Africa.

In Indonesia, Nippon Paper is part of a consortium of Japanese companies that invested in PT TEL, a company that cleared forests, farms and villages to make way for its pulp mill and its associated acacia plantations. Thousands of people were forced off their land. Pollution from the mill has killed fish in the River Lematang. After the mill opened, villagers living along the river complained that the water tasted of chemicals. Many villagers suffer from skin diseases as a result of the pollution.

In 2003, Nippon set up a new laboratory specifically aimed at "bolstering biotechnology research for trees as a raw material for pulp". Nippon Paper's scientists have produced genetic engineered poplar trees which can grow in polluted environments, GE eucalyptus trees with reduced lignin and salt-tolerant GE eucalyptus trees.

Nippon Paper's research into genetic engineering is included in the company's 2003 Environment Report under the heading "Environment-Conscious Technologies".

The draft version of Nippon Paper's "Philosophy and Basic Policy" on raw material procurement makes no mention of ancient forest. It makes no mention of Indigenous Peoples or land rights. It makes no mention of the company's research into GE trees. It makes no mention of the impacts of industrial tree plantations on soils, water and communities. It does not discuss the problems caused by the sheer scale of the company or overconsumption of paper.

Instead, Nippon Paper's draft policy states that the company is "committed" to establishing a "reliable" raw materials procurement system in "consideration" of the environment and society. The draft does not define what "committed" means or how it intends to take the environment and society into "consideration". The word "reliable" gives the game away. Nippon is a huge company with a massive demand for raw material. It is not about to risk interruptions in its supply of raw material.

But the most serious problem with Nippon Paper's "Philosophy and Basic Policy" is that it will be a voluntary agreement. It will not be legally enforceable. The company will only behave in a socially and environmentally responsible way as long as doing so does not reduce the company's profits.

Nippon Paper does not exist for the good of either society or the environment. The company has a "Vision", which consists of a number of "Ideals". Point one of these "Ideals" is to achieve "superior, stable profits for our shareholders". Like all other corporations, Nippon Paper exists to make a profit for its shareholders.

Nevertheless, we should tell Nippon Paper not to buy woodchips from ancient forests. We should tell the company that we are opposed to the spread of industrial monoculture tree plantations. We should tell the company that we are opposed to its research into genetically engineered trees. Send your comments to Nippon Paper here: <http://www.np-g.com/e/news/news05061701.html>.

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