

Dambuster Bob Hawke takes aim at pulp mill proposal

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BOB Hawke has attacked the pulp mill proposed for Tasmania, describing its environmental impact as "devastating". The former Labor prime minister, who used federal powers to halt the Franklin dam 25 years ago, yesterday told *The Australian* he had serious reservations about the Gunns pulp mill, proposed for the Tamar Valley.

"I'd be very sceptical about why it should go ahead," Mr Hawke said. "The environmental impact of it seems to me to be pretty devastating -- both immediately and at the level of ocean (outfall)." The mill will release 64,000 tonnes of treated effluent into Bass Strait each day. Gunns insists the risks to marine life are minimal but the federal Government has demanded further modelling to show how effluent will disperse.

Mr Hawke said his decision to stop the Franklin dam, and provide \$270 million compensation to create jobs and alternative energy sources, showed that it was possible to protect the environment and grow the economy. This required "sensible policies" and while this was "more acknowledged" in Tasmania now than in 1983, debate in the state on such issues was still held back by "vested interests".

Even so, Mr Hawke pointed to a poll by GetUp released yesterday showing 75 per cent of Tasmanians oppose further public subsidies for the pulp mill. Premier David Bartlett yesterday pushed aside that sentiment to extend a deadline by which Gunns must begin construction of the mill or risk losing a sovereign risk agreement with the state Government.

The deal, struck by former premier and pulp mill champion Paul Lennon, grants compensation of up to \$15million to Gunns should further forest protection affect wood supply for the mill. The Lennon government claimed the deal was a requirement of potential financiers of the mill. A clause in the agreement states that it can be terminated if construction of the \$2billion mill proposed for the Tamar Valley, north of Launceston, does not begin "by June 30".

Gunns sought a further extension until November 30, while it continues to court a syndicate of foreign lenders to finance the \$2billion project and awaits further federal approvals. While agreeing to the request, Mr Bartlett said cabinet would remove a clause in the deal that effectively kept the deal alive for an additional six months after the construction deadline.

"The Government has drawn the line in the sand," Mr Bartlett said. "The pulp mill project has divided the Tasmanian community significantly and we believe that the divisions should not last for too much longer."

From November 30, government permits and involvement in the project would end unless Gunns had achieved "real" finance and "real progress" on construction.

"The Tasmanian people have a right to say 'enough is enough'," he said.