

Friends of Forests and Free Speech Supporting the Gunns 20

Friends of Forest and Free Speech (FOFFS) is a non-profit organisation formed largely in response to a \$6.9 million lawsuit brought by Australia's largest woodchipper Gunns Ltd, against 17 individuals and 3 environmental organisations. FOFFS raises funds to cover legal fees and associated expenses of defendants to the case and provides updates to our supporters and other members of the public. It also provides para-legal, administrative and logistical support to the defendants and their lawyers.

Court update

An application was heard over three days in March 2006 to strike out Gunns third statement of claim. The defendants argued that the third statement of claim is so defective that they should not have to respond to it. There is no word yet as to Judge Bongiorno's decision.

It is at the Judge's discretion as to when he hands down his decision.

This follows Gunns first and second statements of claim being thrown out by the court on the basis they were embarrass-

ing. The court awarded costs in relation to the strike out application against Gunns on a "party/party" basis. This means only around 60 – 75% of the actual legal costs for the first strike out application will

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have to be paid by Gunns. Estimates put this figure at around \$1 million.

Important to remember however, is that despite these victories many defendants

will still have large legal bills, not to mention other out-of-pocket expenses associated with defending the lawsuit. The court will consider several of the defendant's claims for costs at a hearing on 8 August 2006. This hearing is heard by the "Taxing Master" not Judge Bongiorno.

For more specific transcripts and other background information on the case please visit the website

www.gunns20.org

Gunns change Lawyers

The defendants' lawyers were recently notified that Gunns Ltd is changing lawyers. Previously represented by EMA Legal, Gunns Ltd have switched to Hunt & Hunt. Hunt & Hunt have offices around Australia including Melbourne and Hobart. The explanation provided for the change is that EMA Legal is closing its Melbourne office. Given at least three defendants use Hobart lawyers this explanation is curious.

More awards for the defendants.

They're just such a talented bunch aren't they? First Louise Morris's (defendant #



8) won a World Environment Day award in June 2005, then Heidi Douglas' (defendant # 5) received an international film award from the Earthvision Environmental Film Festival 2005, and now another award for Heidi!

Heidi's film "Tasmania's forests: A global treasure, A national responsibility" (produced by The Wilderness Society Inc) was recently nominated for the "Best Short Documentary" award at the Forest Film Festival, 2006, Portland Oregon USA.

Latest media news

Gunning for Change

The Wilderness Society's legal coordinator Dr Greg Ogle has documented the increasing number of cases where community activists are involved in litigation in a new report.

The report 'Gunning for Change' examines these cases and discusses a range of reforms and models for protecting public participation from this type of lawsuit.

The report may be downloaded from The Wilderness Society using the link below or if you would like a hardcopy they are available for \$5 by contacting our office.
http://www.wilderness.org.au/campaigns/corporate/gunns/g4c_report/

Lawyers in Support of Public Participation Law Reform

In April of this year, more than 140 lawyers including some of Australia's most eminent legal minds released a statement calling for law reform to protect the community's right to participate in public debate and political activity without

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fear of litigation. They stated that due to the current increase in this type of litigation the community is intimidated, public debate is being silenced and those being sued are placed under extraordinary stress and financial burden. Legislation protecting the communities' right to public debate and participation has been introduced in 25 US jurisdictions and Australian lawyers are calling on our Government to enact similar legislation in Australia.

For a complete copy and list of signatories please visit our website using the link below:

<http://www.gunns20.org/frlawyersstatement20repp.pdf>

Organise a fund raiser in your area

Would you like to gain new skills, support the defendants and at the same time meet lots of like minded people?



Gunns 20 Hobart

We would like to hear from anyone interested in having an event in their local area, a film night, music event, dinner or any ideas of your own to support the defendants.

Our fund raising coordinator Trish will provide any interested persons with a package containing all the information you need to organise a fun night out and then support you as you put on a great event and raise urgently needed funds!

A package would include an upcoming short film about the case, 'Imagine being sued for caring' and also a CD Rom with further information about the defendants and the case, a powerpoint presentation and speech, and sample letters to use when writing to state and federal politicians

Contact Trish: gunns20fundraising@intas.net.au



From top left:

Untouched native forest

Jimmy Barnes in the Styx valley Tasmania with Geoff Law (defendant # 2) and Leanne Minshull (defendant #4)



Senator Bob Brown on the mic

The defendants in Hobart

Do we have the correct information for you?

We have extremely hard working staff and volunteers, however mistakes sometimes occur.

If you have received duplicate information or if you would like to be removed from the mailing list please let our office know via email or post. Likewise if you would like to change any details.

As always, we could not do it without you, our wonderful friends and supporters.

Thank you for your continued support, please keep on spreading the word throughout your networks.

Contacts for FOFFS

There are currently three part time staff members to assist with legal, administrative and fundraising demands.

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