

Media Release

Wednesday 11 March 2009

Endangered Tasmanian devil roadkill may double if Tarkine Road proceeds

The Tasmanian Conservation Trust feels compelled to correct a number of inaccurate media statements made recently regarding the potential for the proposed Tarkine Road to affect the number of roadkill Tasmanian devils.

Legislative Council member for Murchison, Ruth Forrest, has written to two newspapers (Mercury 7 March and Examiner 1 March) claiming the “risk of increasing road kill with the sealing of this tourist road is disputed by a recent study conducted on a similar road in Circular Head. The fact that this road would be travelled at low speeds of 40-60kmh and less travelled at dawn and dusk would suggest an increase in roadkill is highly unlikely”.

Ruth Forrest is referring to the 12.8 km stretch of road between Arthur River and Marrawah sealed in 2003. The study she refers to was prepared for the Circular Head Council by consultant Don Thomson and presented to council on 19 February and not yet publicly available. Her statement is in response to a report in the Circular Head Chronicle on 25 February about Don Thomson’s study. The following edition of the Chronicle on 4 March confirmed that Dr Thomson’s report found there had been an increase in the number of the endangered Tasmanian devils killed but that he claimed this was not significant.

TCT Vice-president Geoff King has recorded the Tasmanian devils killed on the Arthur River Road for four years before its sealing in 2003 and for six year since and provided this vital data for Dr Thomson’s report.

"Regarding Dr Thomson's report I'm not sure what he considers a significant change. As a layman I interpret the approximate 100 per cent increase in devil deaths in some post-sealing years compared to pre-sealing years as significant," Mr Geoff King said. "The average number of devils killed per year before sealing of the road was 19 and after sealing it was 25. This seems significant for an endangered species." Mr King added.

“Sealing roads enables people to drive faster and this is probably the single biggest factor in causing roadkill of any kind” said TCT Acting Director Peter McGlone. “It would be nice to believe drivers would stick to the speed limits for the Tarkine Road, as suggested by Mrs Forrest, but it is likely that many locals will drive at night and would not slow down, as you could expect tourists to” Mr McGlone added.”

“If there is any statistical doubt about the likely impact of sealing the Arthur River Road then we must continue our monitoring for many more years before trying to use these findings to justify the Tarkine Tourist Road. Dr Thomson has called for pre-construction

monitoring of the existing parts of the Tarkine Road to be done for at least five years before construction and we fully support this” said Mr King.

“Let’s not forget that 5km of the proposed Tarkine Road will be new road pushed through virgin forest channeling night-time traffic into an area that has never seen a car. The pre-construction road deaths are currently zero and this area is currently one of the few sanctuaries for devils.” Mr King concluded.

Further information:

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