

Q&A: Native forest logging in Tasmania

May 2023

Why are Tasmania's native forests important?

Tasmania's native forests are globally recognised for their unique species and their conservation value. They are also some of the most carbon dense forests on the planet.¹ Emissions from native forest logging in Tasmania have been estimated at 4.65 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent per year, making it the highest emitting sector in the Tasmanian economy.² The reduction in native forest logging since 2011 has been a major factor in the state's achievement of negative greenhouse emissions, along with hydroelectricity.³

How many people work in native forest logging?

Census figures show that just 885 people worked in all forestry and logging in Tasmania in 2021. This includes both plantation and native forestry. There were a further 1,430 workers across all wood product and paper manufacturing industries. In total, this represents just under 1% of all Tasmanian jobs—and only a fraction of these are actually dependent on native forestry and most could be transitioned to plantation log supply.

A 2018 report commissioned by a forestry industry body estimated that there were 1,112 jobs in native forestry activities, including growing, harvest, haulage and primary processing, down from 4,120 in 2006.⁴ It estimated total forest industry jobs in Tasmania at 3,076, 1.4% of the labour force.

¹ Moroni et al (2011) "Carbon in Trees in Tasmanian State Forest", *International Journal of Forestry Research*, <https://www.hindawi.com/journals/ijfr/2010/690462/>

² Sanger (2022) *Tasmania's forest carbon: from emissions disaster to climate solution*, <https://www.thetreeprojects.com/s/Tasmanias-Forest-Carbon.pdf>; RCFIT (2022) *Tasmanian greenhouse gas emissions report 2022*, https://www.recfit.tas.gov.au/tasmanias_greenhouse_gas_emissions

³ Uibu (2022) "Tasmania goes into carbon negative, with researchers saying native forests must be preserved", ABC, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-05-03/tas-carbon-negative-emission-levels-credited-to-stopping-logging/101032008>

⁴ Schirmer et al (2018) *Socio-economic impacts of the forest industry*, Forest & Wood Products Australia, https://fwpa.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Socio_economic_impacts_of_the_forest_industry_TAS.pdf

Does Tasmania log more native forest than other states?

Yes. 25% of Tasmania's wood product comes from native forest, compared to just 9% for the rest of Australia.⁵ Tasmania accounts for 40% of all native forest log volume in Australia, more than WA, NSW and Queensland combined. Nationally, 88% of wood product comes from plantations, with this number set to rise as Victoria and WA end native forest logging by 2024.

Does native forest logging make money for Tasmania?

No. Sustainable Timbers Tasmania (STT)—the government-owned business enterprise that manages logging in native forests—has been heavily subsidised by the Tasmanian Government. Over the period 1997-2017 STT suffered a cash loss of \$454 million and wrote down the asset value of the forest estate by \$751 million.⁶ In its 2022 Annual Report, STT reported cash receipts from non-government customers of product of \$102 million versus expenses of \$112 million.⁷

How much of the forest ends up as sawlog?

When a forest is logged, less than 1% of that forest's biomass ends up as a sawn timber product.⁸

Some 60% of the forest's biomass is simply left on site, and either burned or left to rot. Of the 40% of biomass that is removed, only 10% (4% of the total biomass) becomes sawlogs—and only 25% of those logs (1% of the total biomass) becomes sawn timber.⁹

⁵ ABARES (2022) *Australian forest and wood products statistics: March and June quarters 2022*, <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/abares/research-topics/forests/forest-economics/forest-wood-products-statistics>

⁶ Lawrence (2018) "Tasmanian regional forest agreement delivers \$1.3bn losses in 'giant fraud' on taxpayers", *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/mar/29/tasmanian-forest-agreement-delivers-13bn-losses-in-giant-on-taxpayers>

⁷ Sustainable Timber Tasmania (2022) *2021–22 Annual Report*, <https://www.sttas.com.au/about-us/annual-reports>

⁸ Sanger (2022) *Tasmania's forest carbon: from emissions disaster to climate solution*

⁹ Ibid.