

# Jobs and trees

## Changing employment in Tasmanian towns

*Forestry represents just 1% of Tasmanian jobs and Tasmanian forestry production is largely based on plantation timber rather than native forest logging. An end to native forestry would have no economic impact on the state as a whole, and the experiences of Geeveston, Triabunna and Derby provide insights for managing economic change at the local level.*

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# Summary

Policies to end native forest logging in Victoria and Western Australia have renewed calls for Tasmania to follow suit.

The debate over how to transition Tasmania and its economy away from native forest logging often ignores three key points:

- Forestry, including related industries, is a very small part of Tasmania's economy, accounting for just 1% of jobs in the state, down from 2% in 2006. In other words, 99% of Tasmanians do not work in forestry or related industries;
- Native forest logging is smaller still: 97% of forestry on private land is now based on plantations rather than native forest. In the 1990s only 10% of private forestry was plantation-based; and
- At a local level, many towns have already diversified away from native forestry. While forestry towns' transition to tourism is often highlighted, employment statistics show that some of these towns have always had relatively diverse local employment, and that the image of tourism "saving" towns is overblown.

This report explores three examples in more detail:

## **Geeveston**

The town of Geeveston is an hour's drive southwest of Hobart, in what has historically been a forestry and apple growing area. Since the 1960s, forestry employment has been in decline, and by 2006 the town had just 33 forestry jobs. At face value, the town appears to have undergone a transition from forestry to tourism: a tree canopy-based tourist attraction, the Tahune Airwalk, opened in 2001 and continues to be a well-known regional destination for tourists, and the town even boasts a famous sushi restaurant. However, aquaculture—comprising both oyster and salmon farming—has been the largest employer in Geeveston this century, while fruit growing continues to be locally significant, along with the education and social service sectors typical of most Australian regions. Professionals with capacity to work from home and or commute to Hobart appear to be a growing demographic in Geeveston.

## **Triabunna**

Triabunna is an hour northeast of Hobart. The town's woodchip mill was well known until its closure in 2011, when it was converted into an events venue that now attracts thousands of visitors per year, along with mainland and international bookings. While

the story of the woodchip mill is well known, in Triabunna—like Geeveston—oyster farming was actually the largest employer at both the 2006 and 2021 censuses, along with considerable fishing and seafood processing employment. Employment in accommodation actually declined during this period, offset by other tourism-related sectors and social services.

### **Derby**

An historic mining and forestry town northeast of Launceston, Derby is now an internationally-renowned mountain biking destination. However, the agriculture industry was the town's largest employer at both the 2006 and 2021 censuses. The influx of mountain bikers and related investors has increased property values significantly; this has enabled some older residents to sell for reasonable prices and move closer to shops and health services, but has also prompted others to move to surrounding towns.

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The experiences of Geeveston, Triabunna and Derby show that Tasmania can end native forest logging and assist all communities through the resulting transition. Communities and policy makers can work with both new and existing industries, without the need to attract famous sushi chefs or other headline-grabbing attractions... as nice as these things are.

# Introduction

The decisions of the Victorian and Western Australian governments to end native forest logging by the end of 2023 have led to renewed calls to end native forestry in Tasmania. These calls have been met by intense resistance from government and industry, which will be unsurprising to even the most casual observer of Tasmanian affairs over recent decades.

The intensity of the native forestry debate in Tasmania overlooks the fact that the state, including its forestry industry, has long since moved on from native logging. There is no need to agonise over a major economic transition, or policy “innovations” like native forest carbon offsets, because the relevant changes—which *did* often bring plenty of agony for the people involved—have largely already taken place.

Between 2006 and 2021, Tasmania’s population increased by over 80,000 people, or 17%. Almost 50,000 jobs were added during these years, representing an increase of 24%. Over the same period, however, employment in forestry, logging, wood product processing, pulp and paper production halved: the number of jobs declined from around 5,000 (2% of Tasmania’s jobs) to 2,300 (only 1%).<sup>1</sup> Population and employment growth in Tasmania have occurred not because of forestry and related industries, but despite it.

While the forestry industry has declined in terms of employment numbers, all is not lost for the industry overall. As a result of the significant changes made to the nature of forestry in Tasmania, some parts of the industry are looking to expand.

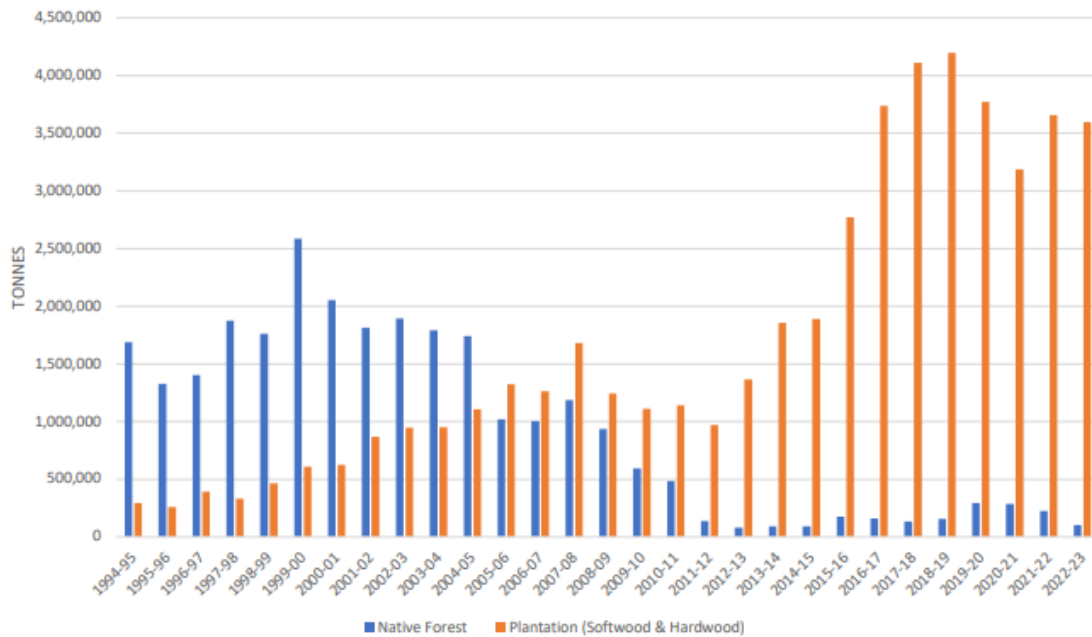
Private forests, which account for 70% of total state production, have largely moved from native forestry to plantation sources, as shown in Figure 1 below:<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Most of the analysis in this report comes from Australian Bureau of Statistics censuses in 2006 and 2021, accessed via Tablebuilder Basic. 2006 and 2021 were chosen mainly because the censuses for these years use the same sub-industry categories and largely the same geographical boundaries. These years also include several significant events in the history of Tasmanian forestry and forest conservation.

<sup>2</sup> (PFT), ‘PFT - Annual Report FY2022-23’, 13.

**Figure 1: Tasmanian forestry on private land, native forest vs plantation harvest**



Source: *Private Forests Annual Report*, financial year 2022–23, page 39

Figure 1 shows that private forestry in Tasmania has shifted overwhelmingly to the use of plantations as the source of its products. In 1994–95, around 90% of private forestry was native forest; by 2022–23, 97% of private forestry was plantation-based. It should be noted that the data in Figure 1 does not cover the entire Tasmanian forestry industry, as a significant share of native forestry conducted on public land. However, the direction in which the industry has moved remains clear.

The move to plantation forestry was made for both efficiency and environmental reasons. The Australia Institute commented on this shift in 2013, noting that the decline in native forestry was due to:

- Competition from softwood and hardwood plantations in Australia;
- Increase in competition from engineered wood products;
- Wood saving innovations suppressing global prices;
- Competition from new woodchip plantation exports in Asia, Africa and South America;
- Reductions in Japanese paper demand and preference for plantation woodchips; and

- Declining competitiveness due to increasing harvesting and haulage costs.<sup>3</sup>

These factors have continued to contribute to the decline of Tasmanian native forestry. They have contributed to events such as the collapse of Tasmania's major forestry company Gunns Ltd, the closure of the Triabunna woodchip mill, and other contractions in native forestry around the state. While the state has managed these changes with no overall economic impact, it has not always been so easy for the smaller towns around which these forestry operations were located.

This paper examines three Tasmanian towns: Geeveston, Triabunna and Derby. All three have seen significant decline in forestry activity and resulting economic change. While all three are sometimes described as forestry towns that have transitioned to tourism, employment data shows that jobs in these towns were—and remain—more diverse than is often assumed. While the forestry sector declined, all three towns have seen other primary, secondary or service industries develop, leaving each with a seemingly stable and sustainable base of economic activity for the future.

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew Macintosh (2013) *The Australian Native Forest Sector: Causes of the Decline and Prospects for the Future*, Technical Brief, The Australia Institute, p 3, [https://australiainstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/TB-21-State-of-the-native-forest-industry\\_1\\_3.pdf](https://australiainstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/TB-21-State-of-the-native-forest-industry_1_3.pdf).

# Geeveston

Geeveston is situated around an hour's drive southwest of Hobart. The town has the classic Tasmanian industrial history of apple growing and logging, but today it has a diverse economy that extends across several primary industries, processing and service sectors.

The Huon Timber Company established an early industrial-scale mill in Geeveston in 1902.<sup>4</sup> Pulp and paper production followed in later decades, and the former was the town's largest employer throughout the 1960s.<sup>5</sup> After this high water mark, employment declined and pulp production shut down temporarily in the late 1970s. Operations continued with some interruptions until the pulp mill's closure in 1991.<sup>6</sup> The policy changes in 1989 removed two thirds of the southern forests from commercial forestry had a significant impact on Geeveston. Unemployment rose sharply, particularly amongst younger residents, reaching an estimated 35-40% youth unemployment rate, which caused many young people to leave the town.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, forestry and related industries remained significant in Geeveston into the 2010s, when the closure of the Triabunna woodchip mill, the collapse of Gunns Ltd and later forestry agreements significantly reduced the size of the industry. State and federal funding packages were implemented to mitigate these impacts.

In the late 1990s, planning began on what would become the Tahune Airwalk, a tree canopy walk structure modelled on similar successful attractions in the Daintree Rainforest in Queensland and the Valley of the Giants in Western Australia.<sup>8</sup> The Airwalk opened in 2001, and was credited with turning the tide of the town's economic prospects. The walk attracted 150,000 visitors in its first year, but challenges followed

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Turnbull, 'Geeveston - Place - Companion to Tasmanian History', Document (School of Humanities, University of Tasmania), accessed 15 November 2023, <https://www.utas.edu.au/tasmanian-companion/biogs/E000411b.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> Megan Stronach, 'Cultural Change or an Uneasy Truce?: Forestry and Tourism in Geeveston, Southern Tasmania', *Tasmanian Historical Studies*, January 2017, 58, <https://search.informit.org/doi/abs/10.3316/ielapa.016309554667511>.

<sup>6</sup> Editor, 'Trivialised by Forestry Tasmania - Tasmanian Times'.

<sup>7</sup> Stronach, 60.

<sup>8</sup> Stronach, 'Cultural Change or an Uneasy Truce?', 64.



this initial success: visitor numbers halved by 2016,<sup>9</sup> and damage suffered in the 2018–19 bushfires forced the structure to close until 2020.<sup>10</sup>

Despite this, the Airwalk is seen as a significant part of the region’s tourism offerings, which also encompass other adventure activities in Hartz Mountains National Park, along with local culinary experiences. The latter include a famous sushi restaurant founded by a Japanese chef, one of many overseas migrants to Geeveston in recent years.<sup>11</sup>

The historic decline of the pulp and paper industries in Geeveston and the emergence of prominent tourism attractions tend to distract from the relatively diverse range of employment in the town over recent decades. As shown in Table 1 below, in 2006 aquaculture was already the major employer of Geeveston residents:

**Table 1: Top 10 industries by number of employees, Geeveston 2006 and 2021**

2006		2021	
<b>Aquaculture</b>	70	<b>Aquaculture</b>	70
<b>Forestry and logging</b>	33	<b>School education</b>	31
<b>School education</b>	31	<b>Other social assistance services</b>	27
<b>Fruit and tree nut growing</b>	26	<b>Supermarket and grocery stores</b>	18
<b>Hospitals</b>	20	<b>Fruit and tree nut growing</b>	16
<b>Supermarket and grocery stores</b>	15	<b>Residential care services</b>	15
<b>Hardware, building and garden supplies retailing</b>	14	<b>Building cleaning, pest control and gardening services</b>	14
<b>Cafes, restaurants and takeaway food services</b>	13	<b>Legal and accounting services</b>	12
<b>Local government administration</b>	13	<b>Residential building construction</b>	11
<b>Road freight transport</b>	13	<b>Pharmaceutical and other store-based retailing</b>	10

Source: ABS census

<sup>9</sup> Stronach, 70.

<sup>10</sup> Guy Barnett, 'The Sky's the Limit as Tahune Adventures Re-Opens', Premier of Tasmania, accessed 30 October 2023, [https://www.premier.tas.gov.au/releases/the\\_skys\\_the\\_limit\\_as\\_tahune\\_adventures\\_re-opens](https://www.premier.tas.gov.au/releases/the_skys_the_limit_as_tahune_adventures_re-opens).

<sup>11</sup> Belinda Cleary, 'Meet the Man Touted as Australia's Best Sushi Chef', Mail Online, 20 December 2015, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3353733/His-restaurant-popular-open-twice-week-people-travel-sample-delicacies-Meet-man-touted-Australia-s-best-sushi-chef.html>.

As shown in Table 1, aquaculture has been a consistent employer of Geeveston residents this century, via both salmon and oyster farming. Fruit growing continues to be a locally significant primary industry, while the role of service industries is common to most Australian regional towns. The inclusion of professional services such as legal and accounting services suggests that numbers of professionals with capacity to work from home and or commute to Hobart may be increasing.

Forestry and related industries continue to have a presence in the Geeveston area, with five workers in forestry and logging at the 2021 census. The Southwood Mill is a 26-minute drive away and processes both native forest and plantation products.<sup>12</sup> The mill recently announced expanded activities and increasing employment.<sup>13</sup>

Native forestry continues in the area, with plantations and native forest coupes between Geeveston and the start of the Hartz Mountains National Park and the Southwest National Park.<sup>14</sup> The high biodiversity values of some of these forests—including nesting habitats for the critically endangered swift parrot—have caused ongoing tensions between locals, environmental organisations and state-owned logging company Sustainable Timber Tasmania (STT). Legal action in late 2022 saw a neighbouring apple farmer and the Wilderness Society (Tasmania) take STT to court successfully in a bid for an immediate halt to logging of areas that contained swift parrot habitat.<sup>15</sup>

Geeveston has moved away from its historic role as a forestry town and transformed its cultural identity towards a different form of forest heritage. This has been a complex and tense transition, but socio-economic and political pressures slowly dissipated once the benefits of this transition flowed throughout the wider community.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Pip Courtney, 'Landline - Positive Approach Regenerates Timber Town.', *ABC News*, 22 August 2004, <https://www.abc.net.au/local/archives/landline/content/2004/s1181101.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> Huon News, 'Doubling Production', *Huon News - Local News & Photos around the Huon Valley Region*, 10 February 2021, <https://www.huonnews.com/news/local-news/233-doubling-production>.

<sup>14</sup> Sustainable Timbers Tasmania (STT), 'Access Map', Sustainable Timber Tasmania, accessed 15 November 2023, <https://sttas.com.au/forests-you/access-map>.

<sup>15</sup> *Tasmanian Times*, 'Mt Tongatabu Logging Injunction Upheld - Tasmanian Times', 8 December 2022, <https://tasmaniantimes.com/2022/12/mt-tongatabu-logging-injunction-upheld/>.

<sup>16</sup> Stronach, 'Cultural Change or an Uneasy Truce?', 71.

# Triabunna

Triabunna is a town of between 900 and 1,000 residents, located an hour northeast of Hobart. The town was known for its woodchip mill and export facility, which operated from the early 1970s until its closure in April 2011. The mill's closure was controversial—it was sold by Gunns Ltd to two well-known businesspeople and environmentalists, Graeme Wood and Jan Cameron, whose intention was to redevelop it as a tourism destination.<sup>17 18</sup>

The Triabunna woodchip mill was among the largest in the world and was the primary processing and export hub for the surrounding region, which extended as far as Geeveston and Huonville. Gunns had a licence for 600,000 tonnes of woodchips per year from the Triabunna Mill; this required an input of approximately 100,000 trees from native forests each year.<sup>19</sup> At the peak of the mill's operations, there was a logging truck leaving the Southern forests every five to ten minutes, with many heading to Triabunna and offloading the logged trees at the mill.<sup>20</sup>

The forestry industry supported businesses like Elphinstone, which manufactured logging trailers locally in Triabunna and employed 40 people at the industry's height.<sup>21</sup> Once the mill closed, Forestry Tasmania ceased operations on the East Coast and other areas in Southern Tasmania.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> 'Triabunna Woodchip Mill: Timeline of Key Events', *ABC News*, 13 October 2015, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-10-14/triabunna-woodchip-mill-timeline-of-key-events/6823748>.

<sup>18</sup> Matthew Denholm, 'Jan Cameron, Graeme Wood Tasmanian Triabunna Woodchip Mill Deal on Native Forests', *News.Com.Au*, 13 July 2011, sec. Environment, <https://www.news.com.au/technology/environment/jan-cameron-graeme-wood-tasmanian-triabunna-woodchip-mill-deal-on-native-forests/news-story/81e26dd5345000227ab8f25b714964bb>.

<sup>19</sup> Spring Bay Mill, 'History of Spring Bay Mill', Spring Bay Mill, accessed 7 November 2023, <https://www.springbaymill.com/history>.

<sup>20</sup> John van Tiggelen, 'The Destruction of the Triabunna Mill and the Fall of Tasmania's Woodchip Industry', *Text, The Monthly*, 1 July 2014, <https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2014/july/1404136800/john-van-tiggelen/destruction-triabunna-mill-and-fall-tasmanias-woodchip->

<sup>21</sup> van Tiggelen.

<sup>22</sup> Blair Richards, 'Mill Misery Spelled out at Parliamentary Inquiry into the Sale of Gunns' Triabunna Woodchip Mill', *The Mercury*, 12 August 2014, sec. Tasmania, <https://themercury.com.au/news/tasmania/mill-misery-spelled-out-at-parliamentary-inquiry-into-the-sale-of-gunns-triabunna-woodchip-mill/news-story/e9b5e3e10262430864dfec39f98fee97>.

When protests halted operations at the site in 2008, the resultant images of queues of loaded log trucks were published widely in the Tasmanian media, as shown in Figure 2 below:

**Figure 2: Log trucks outside Triabunna woodchip mill, 2008**



Source: <https://www.news.com.au/national/tasmania/latest-policy-proposals-would-have-done-nothing-to-resolve-issues-in-tasmanias-forestry-industry/news-story/4d90132d87faf0c065a6725126f0334c>

The renaming of the Triabunna Mill as the Spring Bay Mill, and its conversion into an events venue, have also been well publicised. Data provided by the venue shows that it hosted 47 events in 2022, attended by 2,400 visitors. A total of 87 events have been held or booked so far in 2023, with approximately 4,700 visitors. The 2023 bookings include five international bookings with a total of nearly 400 attendees, and 31 bookings from mainland Australia with over 1,500 attendees, suggesting that the venue is attracting visitors to Tasmania in its own right. This brings benefits for the wider Tasmanian and local tourism sectors—the area around the mill has a spectacular coastline and is the transport link to Maria Island National Park.

Again, however, the focus on the transition of the woodchip mill to tourism—a focus that is shared by both politicians and the media—tends to distract from the diversity of local industry and the wider changes that have taken place in the region. As shown in Table 2 below, neither tourism nor forestry-related sectors were the largest employers even in 2006, well before the mill’s closure.

**Table 2: Top 10 industries by number of employees, Triabunna 2006 and 2021**

2006		2021	
<b>Aquaculture</b>	41	<b>Aquaculture</b>	46
<b>Accommodation</b>	37	<b>Accommodation</b>	20
<b>Log Sawmilling and Timber Dressing</b>	25	<b>School Education</b>	19
<b>Sheep, Cattle &amp; Grain Farming</b>	24	<b>Local Government Administration</b>	14
<b>Seafood Processing</b>	23	<b>Fishing</b>	13
<b>Forestry and Logging</b>	16	<b>Residential Care Services</b>	12
<b>Local Government Administration</b>	15	<b>Not stated</b>	11
<b>Fishing, Hunting and Trapping, not further described</b>	13	<b>Supermarket and Grocery Stores</b>	11
<b>Grocery Wholesaling</b>	13	<b>Building Cleaning, and Services</b>	10
<b>Road Freight Transport</b>	13	<b>Building Construction, not further described</b>	9

Source: ABS census

Table 2 shows that in 2006 the single largest employer of Triabunna residents was aquaculture, specifically oyster farming, which operated alongside considerable seafood processing and other fishing activities. There was also already substantial employment in accommodation and other services, as well as agriculture. This is not to say that forestry and the mill were insignificant—sawmilling, forestry and related freight transport combined represented a significant share of employment, perhaps 13% of all jobs.

In 2021, aquaculture remained Triabunna’s largest employing industry, with employment within aquaculture diversified into the often-controversial salmon industry. Table 2 shows that employment in accommodation actually declined between 2006 and 2021, although this was to some extent offset by gains in other tourism-related sectors such as food and beverage services, according to census data not shown in Table 2.

Overall, Triabunna’s population declined slightly from 957 to 905 between 2006 and 2021, with employment declining from 409 jobs to 321. While the closure of the mill and its redevelopment as a function centre was likely a part of this change, the census data shows that a diverse range of industries is operating in the area, and that this diversity has contributed to Triabunna being able to make such a seemingly major change in industrial focus without significant change in overall population.

# Derby

Derby is a 90-minute drive northeast of Launceston. The town was a mining centre with a population of over 3,000 in the late 1800s, but forestry became its main industry following a major mine accident in 1929.<sup>23</sup> Today, agriculture remains the largest employing industry, but over the last decade Derby has developed world-class mountain bike trails that have led to economic and social change, both in Derby itself and in surrounding towns.

Table 3 below shows aggregated employment numbers for the years 2006 and 2021 for Derby and its nearest-neighbouring towns, Winnaleah, Branxholm, Legerwood and Ringarooma.

**Table 3: Top 10 industries by employees, Derby and surrounds, 2006 and 2021**

2006		2021	
<b>Agriculture</b>	204	<b>Agriculture</b>	157
<b>Wood and Paper Product Manufacturing</b>	58	<b>Food and Beverage Services</b>	22
<b>Forestry and Logging</b>	32	<b>Public Administration</b>	22
<b>Road Transport</b>	32	<b>Preschool and School Education</b>	22
<b>Education</b>	30	<b>Construction Services</b>	16
<b>Food Retailing</b>	28	<b>Wood Product Manufacturing</b>	15
<b>Accommodation, Cafes and Restaurants</b>	26	<b>Food Retailing</b>	15
<b>Government Administration</b>	26	<b>Building Cleaning, Pest Control and Other Support Services</b>	13
<b>Health Services</b>	13	<b>Road Transport</b>	11
<b>All industries total</b>	617		425

Source: ABS Census

Table 3 shows that agriculture was, and remains, the largest source of jobs in Derby and neighbouring towns. The decline between 2006 and 2021 likely reflects the closure

<sup>23</sup> Carolyn Beasley, 'Going with the Flow down Derby Way', *National Geographic*, 27 February 2020, <https://bluederbypodside.com.au/uploads/general/Derby-Mountain-biking.pdf>.

of a vegetable factory and milk facilities in the region. The local mayor estimated the total job loss in the region between 2007 and 2015 as approximately 900 jobs.<sup>24</sup>

Table 3 also shows the decline in forestry jobs, with wood product manufacturing declining from 58 jobs in 2006 to 15 and just four forestry workers, not visible in Table 3. This reflects that there are still small-scale specialty sawmills in the Derby area, like the Goshen Mill, near the Blue Tier Reserve.

However, Table 3 also shows the shift to new industries linked to the mountain bike developments. Construction services, building cleaning and food retailing employment all likely relate to the significant redevelopment of properties in the area for rental to mountain bikers.

Derby real estate prices have been affected since the mountain bike trails opened in 2015. Before the trails opened, the town was home to blocks “you wouldn’t have been able to give away”.<sup>25</sup> In 2014, properties were worth an average of \$115k,<sup>26</sup> and some had been sitting on the market for three years.<sup>27</sup> The value of these same properties has more than quadrupled, with modest unrenovated cottages on average blocks selling from \$550k by 2022,<sup>28</sup> and an unrenovated two-bedroom cottage on a larger block close to town sold for a \$1.3m in August 2021, a figure that was a record at the time.<sup>29</sup>

While such increases in prices would often be problematic for small towns, some reports suggest that a key impact was allowing older long-term residents to sell their homes and move to Scottsdale or Launceston in order to be closer to shops and health services.<sup>30</sup> In their place, families moved to start businesses, and individuals arrived seeking gap-year experiences.<sup>31</sup> The turnover is evident within the town’s remaining

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<sup>24</sup> Beasley, ‘Going with the Flow down Derby Way’.

<sup>25</sup> Ogilvie.

<sup>26</sup> Imogen Smith, ‘Derby: Then and Now’, Australian Mountain Bike, 30 August 2022, <https://www.ambmag.com.au/feature/derby-then-and-now-581841>.

<sup>27</sup> Bearup, ‘From “Two Feet in the Grave” to Boom Town in Just Six Years’.

<sup>28</sup> Smith, ‘Derby’.

<sup>29</sup> ‘This Rundown Cottage Was up for Auction When a Mountain Biker Stopped and Bid. Here’s How Much It Went For’, ABC News, 30 August 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-08-31/derby-crack-house-sells-for-1-3-million/100419092>.

<sup>30</sup> Smith, ‘Derby’.

<sup>31</sup> Bearup, ‘From “Two Feet in the Grave” to Boom Town in Just Six Years’.

population, with 23% of the residents having moved from interstate and other parts of Tasmania over the last five years.<sup>32</sup>

In 2021, the Dorset Council conducted an informal employment survey, linking 120 jobs to the mountain biking centre and hundreds more jobs created throughout the district.<sup>33</sup> For affordability reasons, many staff and service sector workers have moved to surrounding areas such as Ringarooma, Legerwood, and Winnaleah, which skews the data on Derby's population and employment.<sup>34</sup>

The 85-hectare Blue Tier Reserve is connected to Derby by bike trails and a 20-minute shuttle bus service. The Reserve is an integral part of the Blue Derby mountain biking experience, but is also home to rare and threatened species, such as the Spotted-tail quoll, Tasmanian Devil, and the Tasmanian masked owl, which nests in the Reserve's old tree hollows. The Tasmanian Land Conservancy purchased the Reserve in 2012 to manage the area's unique conservation values and the ecological threats within and beyond its boundaries, such as the clear-felling of a neighbouring property in 2007.<sup>35</sup>

Many mountain bike trails also fall within remaining forestry areas,<sup>36</sup> which has led to some tensions between stakeholders. In 2021, STT had coupes scheduled for clear-felling beyond a 50m protection buffer around the trails, which brought protests and legal action from mountain bikers, walkers and tourism operators.<sup>37</sup> The Tasmanian Supreme Court dismissed the case against the Forest Practices Authority and STT in

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<sup>32</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 'Census 2021 - Derby (Tas.) - Community Profiles', accessed 6 November 2023, <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/community-profiles/2021/SAL60150>.

<sup>33</sup> Bearup, 'From "Two Feet in the Grave" to Boom Town in Just Six Years'.

<sup>34</sup> Smith, 'Derby'.

<sup>35</sup> Tasmanian Land Conservancy (TLC), 'Blue Tier Reserve Management Plan 2017-2022', 2017, 7, <https://tasland.org.au/content/uploads/2015/06/Blue-Tier-Reserve-Management-Plan-2017-2022.pdf>.

<sup>36</sup> Sustainable Timbers Tasmania (STT), 'Mountain Biking', accessed 16 November 2023, <https://sttas.com.au/forests-you/recreational-activities/mountain-biking>.

<sup>37</sup> Jackson Worthington, 'Protesters Descend on Mountain Bike Trails', *The Canberra Times*, 29 December 2020, <https://www.theadvocate.com.au/story/7070334/protesters-descend-on-derby-mountain-bike-trails/>.



December 2022.<sup>38</sup> However, an appeal filed in April 2022<sup>39</sup> was still pending at the time of writing.<sup>40</sup>

In response to of harvesting coups in the broader footprint of the Blue Derby mountain biking area, STT removed planned logging coups from its three-year wood production plan for 2020–21 to 2023–24 and did not reinstate them on the most recent production plan released in July 2023.<sup>41</sup>

The changes in Derby highlight many common challenges of locals feeling a loss of culture, lack of consultation and alienation from the needs of the new economy.<sup>42</sup> New residents attracted by the surrounding natural environment and tourism opportunities see Derby’s situation differently to long-term residents—they see the town’s environment as a “beautiful asset” that creates a unique brand and that, unlike extractive industries of the past, is economically sustainable. This sentiment is shared by at least one resident of 70 years, who told the ABC that it “means the town will never die now”.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Erin Cooper-Douglas, “Just the Beginning”: Blue Tier Group to Continue Logging Fight after Legal Setback’, *ABC News*, 9 December 2022, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-12-09/blue-tier-group-to-continue-logging-fight-after-legal-setback/101755730>.

<sup>39</sup> Benjamin Seeder, ‘Activists Claim Forestry Self-Regulation Akin to Lawyers Deciding Own Cases’, *The Examiner*, 18 April 2023, <https://www.examiner.com.au/story/8163419/activists-claim-forestry-self-regulation-akin-to-lawyers-deciding-own-cases/>.

<sup>40</sup> Vanessa Bleyer, Blue Derby Wilds legal representatives Bleyer Lawyers interview., interview by Andrew Bakonyi, 15 November 2023.

<sup>41</sup> Bleyer, Blue Derby Wilds legal representatives Bleyer Lawyers interview.

<sup>42</sup> Jess Davis, ‘Tassie Battle between Ecotourism, Forestry Playing out in Derby’, *ABC News*, 6 August 2017, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-07/tasmanias-battle-between-ecotourism-forestry-plays-out-in-derby/8766304>.

<sup>43</sup> Davis.

# Conclusion

Economic change brings social and personal challenges. Governments should assist communities, families and individuals to ensure their wellbeing when economic forces beyond their control make significant impacts on their lives and livelihoods.

The towns of Geeveston, Triabunna and Derby have first-hand experience of such changes and related difficulties. Like many other towns in Tasmania, they have seen native forest industries decline and other industries emerge. Their current and former residents could, no doubt, provide valuable opinions on how such changes were managed and how they could be better managed for other towns.

Not all Tasmanian towns can reinvent themselves into international events centres or mountain biking destinations. But census data shows that these aspects of these towns' experiences were only part of the story of their economic changes. Other primary, secondary and service industries played significant roles.

This should provide encouragement that Tasmania can end native forest logging and assist all communities through the resulting impacts. Communities and policy makers can work with existing and new industries, without the need to attract famous sushi chefs or other headline-grabbing attractions... as nice as such things are.