

Fig 1: Existing national parks and reserves and park extensions proposed by Tasmanian conservationists to preserve wilderness areas and create a representative park system. Bioreserves are smaller areas proposed to protect all Tasmania's endemic plant species.
(Source: Forest Action Network)

Fig 2: Three woodchip companies have exclusive and long-term rights over most of Tasmania's forests. One company, Associated Pulp and Paper Mills (APPM) controls state forest over half the state.
(Source: Forest Action Network)

400 ha a week.

The major threat to Tasmania's native forests is now woodchipping. A huge 2.6 million cubic metres of hardwood native forests are chipped each year. Virtually all of this is exported unprocessed to Japan. Over 400 hectares of forest are cleared in Tasmania each week and woodchipping threatens all the proposed reserves. Clearfelling for woodchips is irreversibly turning natural tapestries into controlled tree farms or derelict land.

One company, Associated Pulp and Paper Mills (APPM) alone holds the exclusive and long-term rights to pulp the wood from over half of Tasmania. Two other woodchip companies have concessions over much of the remainder of the forests. The companies operate under export licences issued by the Federal Government which expire in 1988. Conservation groups and even Forestry Commission staff want controls on these licences to help Tasmania's environment and economy. Studies published by Tasmanian conservationists show that far from benefitting the Tasmanian economy, woodchipping incurs major economic costs. Since woodchipping commenced twelve years ago, 4,000 jobs have been lost in the State's forest industry. Woodchipping employs eight times fewer people per volume of wood cut than paper-making and is also propped up by a \$20 million annual public subsidy for roads, railways and administration. Alternative forestry schemes which create more jobs, generate more revenue and are far less environmentally destructive have been put forward in a *Forest Industry Strategy for Tasmania* by conservation groups who

have united in a coalition called the Forest Action Network. Overall their plan shows that it is possible to create all the proposed reserves and improve environmental controls on forestry operations without loss of jobs.

Nature tourism booming

The Network is also actively promoting nature-based tourism which provides jobs without destroying natural and wilderness values. Their booklet *Explore Tasmania's Wild* describes hundreds of natural areas throughout the State for camping and nature walks and other outdoor activities. They have also produced brochures to guide tourists through Tasmania's South-West World Heritage Area.

Sadly their enthusiasm cannot be harnessed by State Government agencies, well aware of the world-wide boom in nature-based tourism.

"The Franklin-Gordon River blockade focussed world attention on Tasmania, however we've been instructed by Government not to capitalise on the publicity in our tourist promotions", says Tourism Department director, Gordon Dean. The State Government has even banned Tourism Department and Parks and Wildlife Service offices from displaying attractive tourist road guide brochures produced by the Wilderness Society. Parks and Wildlife Service staff were recently instructed by Government not to even talk to the Wilderness Society!

Despite this, the tourists keep coming and last year 72,000 people went on tourist cruises up the Gordon River from the small West Coast town of Strahan.

Times are changing. Tasmanians know that if they don't promote their natural areas, mainland Australia visitors will simply go to New Zealand which has no hesitation in such nature tourism promotions. The tourist attractions of convict settlements and casino are giving way to rainforests, wild rivers and wilderness. Meanwhile the courageous stand of Tasmanian conservationists both within Government agencies like the Parks and Wildlife Service and in the coalition of conservation groups can only be admired. They deserve our full support.

In 1976, the Tasmanian state government commissioned a Canadian consultant, David Young, to report on Tasmania's forests and forestry. In a chapter entitled "It Tolls For Thee" he concluded: "The 400,000 people who live in Tasmania enjoy one of the richest and one of the most beautiful parts of the earth. What they have done to it, and what they are doing to it, is an offence against nature, and a crime against their fellow [humans] What is needed is the scarcest resource of all: humility. Until the people of Tasmania abandon the arrogant view that they have a right to destroy the island, desecration, despoilation and waste will continue. No report, no recommendations, will generate humility." The report was not released.

The author acknowledges the assistance of an ANZAC Fellowship for a four month conservation study tour in Australia in early 1985, and the help of the Wilderness Society and Australian Conservation Foundation.

All photos except for the pigmy possum by Gerry McSweeney

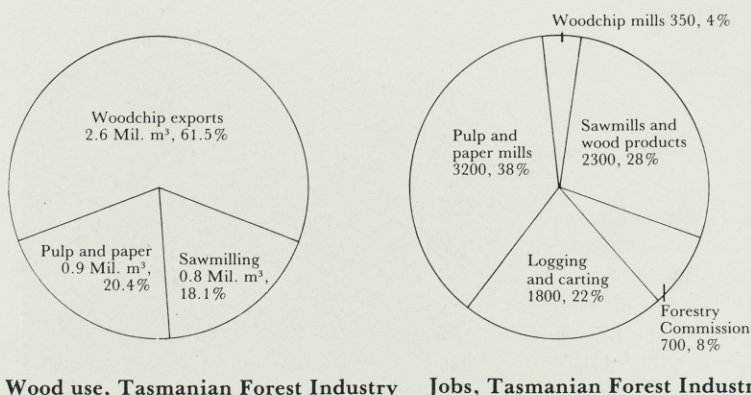


Fig 3: More chips — fewer jobs. 61.5% of the state's wood is chipping for export but this generates few jobs and is propped up by hidden subsidies.
(Source: Tasmanian timber industry statistics 1983-84)



6,000 Tasmanians marched through Hobart's main streets on 19 April 1985 to protest against uncontrolled woodchipping, now recognised as both an environmental and economic disaster.