

# History of Tasmania's Forest Service

## Building Knowledge

In these days of Google Earth and GPS systems, it's hard to understand just how little was known about Tasmania's forests in 1920.

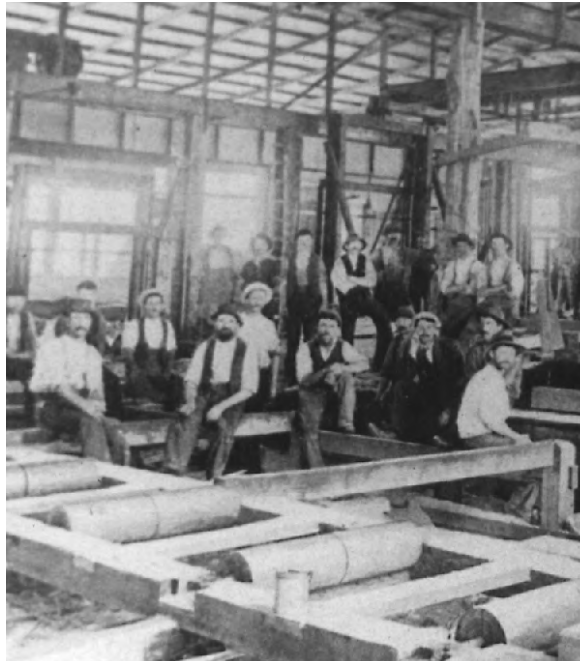
- Where were the forests?
- How extensive were they?
- How did eucalypt trees grow?
- How did forests regenerate?

Tasmania's first foresters set out to learn what they could – and to earn revenue from forest resources to fund their activities. Progress was slow at first, although Australia's first aerial-mapping photography was an initiative of the Forestry Department as early as 1930.

After World War II, new legislation in 1947 created the Forestry Commission, which took responsibility for the task of achieving sustainable yield and conserving the forest resource for the future.

The job of gathering knowledge and understanding moved quickly – new technology enabled the collection of detailed information about Tasmania's forests.

The data showed that forests were still being exploited too quickly – the post-war building boom saw the volume of sawn timber doubling in the decade between 1947 and 1957.



## The Regeneration Question

The key to sustainable yield was to ensure that harvested forests regenerated quickly and effectively. Research in the late 1950s showed that clear-felling an area of forest, burning the debris and re-sowing with seed (initially from trees left on the coupe, then later from seed

collected during harvesting) created ideal conditions for regeneration. Just like natural wildfire, this harvesting strategy left behind a clear seed-bed so that seedlings could grow quickly. But clear-felling means that a large quantity of lower-grade wood is harvested, along with the high-quality sawlogs. A market was found for this low-grade material, as woodchips to make paper pulp and composite timber products such as particle board.

The export woodchip market increased the financial return from Tasmania's production forests. But private forests were still being felled rapidly – and unlike harvested State forests, they were often not regenerated.

Today, less than 40% of the native state forests available for production are harvested each year using clear-felling – the rest are done by different kinds of partial harvesting, including the recent innovation of variable retention systems in oldgrowth forests.

