



Forest Practices Authority (FPA)

The Forest Practices Authority (FPA) is an independent statutory body responsible for administering the Tasmanian forest practices system. The system regulates the management of forest and threatened non-forest vegetation on both public and private land.

The FPA employs specialists in botany, zoology, soil and water, geoscience and cultural heritage. The FPA conducts research and monitoring within the following programs:

- Biodiversity Program
- Earth Science and Cultural Heritage Program.

Forest Practices News

Forest Practices News is a publication produced by the FPA which provides access to a series of articles highlighting a variety of research and monitoring projects along with insights into the other activities of the FPA.

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For further information and access to other articles please visit the FPA website ([publications/Forest Practices News](#)): [click here](#)



The changing face of Tasmania's forest estate

Graham Wilkinson, Chief Forest Practices Officer

We don't need statistics to tell us that Tasmania's forestry sector has been on a roller-coaster of change, which ironically began in 1996 with the commencement of a 20 year vision for security and stability under the Regional Forest Agreement (RFA). In return for transferring a large portion of 'production forests' to 'reserves' the forest industry was given a green light by governments to embark upon a program of 'growing more wood from less land' through the intensification of wood production from remaining non-reserve native forests and a substantial increase in the plantation estate.

Forest intensification peaked in 2006, with operations covering 60 000 ha, about half of which involved the establishment of new plantations through the conversion

of native forests and the planting of previously cleared land. Since then forest operations have dramatically dropped by 75 per cent to about 15 000 ha p.a. with virtually no further establishment of new plantations. The massive expansion of plantations during the decade following the RFA declined rapidly after 2009, principally because of the introduction of a prohibition on conversion under the Australian Forestry Standard and because of the (unrelated) collapse of the managed investment schemes. The clearing of land for agriculture has historically been the major cause of forest loss in Tasmania and one could hypothesise that over the last 200 years the vast majority of land suitable for agriculture has already been cleared. Agricultural clearing over the last decade or so has been reasonably stable

at about 1800 ha per year. Clearing for urban expansion and other developments continues to be low, reflecting the modest rate of population growth and economic development in Tasmania.

This above story is captured in the statistics published by the FPA in its annual reports and in the five yearly reports on the state of the forests (Figures 1 and 2). The assessments done for the RFA showed that by 1996 Tasmania had lost about half of its original forest cover since European settlement. After the RFA, the total forest cover began to increase, although all of this increase was associated with the expansion of plantations, which more than doubled to 314 000 ha whilst the net area of native forest fell by about 5 per cent (150 000 ha). Since 2011, Tasmania's total forest cover



The changing face of Tasmania's forest estate (continued)

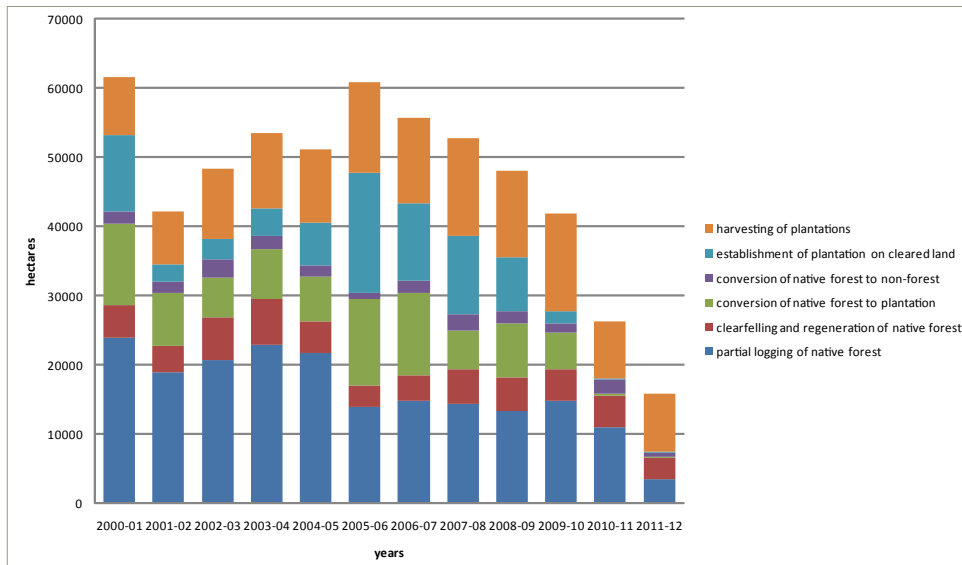


Figure 1 Area of forest by various treatments from 2001–2012

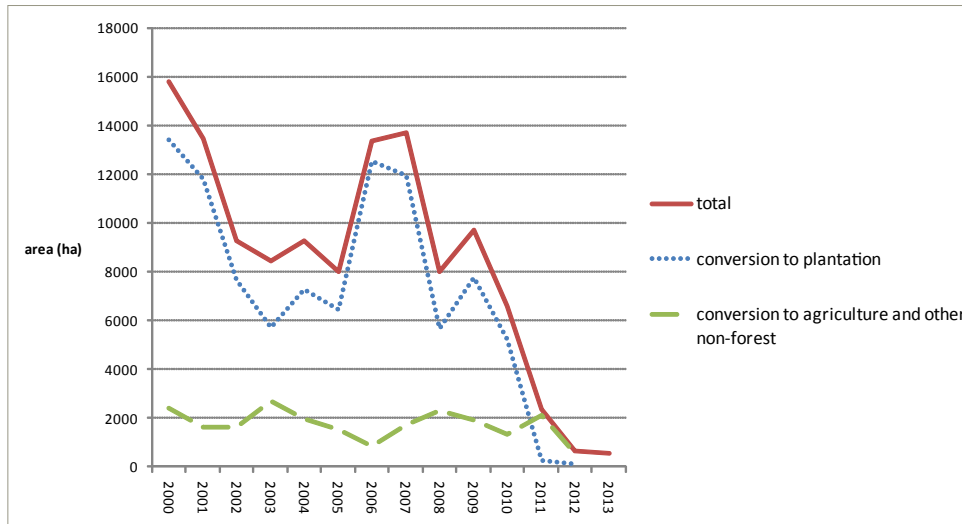


Figure 2 Area of native forest converted since 2000

has again gone into decline because the conversion of native forests and plantations

to agriculture exceeds the level of new plantings on cleared land.

The above statistics are of historical interest, but of course they don't tell the human story. The future holds many challenges for our forestry sector but we have two key strengths. First, we still have a substantial forest estate: forests that are highly resilient to the impacts wrought by nature and humans. How often do we hear the media talking about a wildfire that has 'destroyed' forests? Probably not as often as we hear them promulgating the myth that more reserves are needed to 'protect' forests from logging. Fortunately, the forests know better: they happily grow back from both wildfires and logging given the right care and attention.

Our second strength is our people: foresters, forest workers, scientists, landowners and many others who have the knowledge, skills and commitment to wisely manage our forest resources for the wide range of services and goods that they can provide to society.

The recent passage of the Tasmanian Forest Agreement heralds another era of change for our state's forests. Irrespective of whether our forests are in reserves, private forests or public wood production zones, they will still need to be managed. To do this we will need to continue to value and use the incredible bank of human expertise and knowledge that we have in Tasmania; we cannot hope to optimise the ongoing environmental, economic and social worth of our forests unless we maintain a healthy investment in our human capital.

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