
[Australia: Gunns plans massive new pulp mill in Tasmania](#)

Before cutting any trees, Tasmania's timber industry divides the forests into coupes. It bulldozes roads through the forest. When the coupes are clearfelled only the large logs are taken. The vast amount of wood remaining is heaped into piles. Helicopters drop what the industry calls liquefied diesel gel (and the rest of us call napalm) and the remains of the forest are burnt. Huge clouds of smoke hang over Tasmania for weeks.

The timber industry does not stop there. It sprays herbicide to prevent the forest growing back. The possums, wallabies, wombats, quolls, potaroos and other wildlife which lived in the forests are now pests, at least as far as the industry is concerned. Workers place carrots laced with 1080 poison between rows of tree seedlings and on the edge of the forests. Last year, almost 100,000 animals died as a result of 1080 poison.

Once the monoculture tree plantations start to grow, plantation managers use helicopters to spray pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers. People near the plantations have also been sprayed. Downstream of the plantations, water supplies have been poisoned by the chemical cocktail sprayed on the plantations.

Industrial tree plantations are drying up swamps, streams and rivers. "The monocultural plantations that replace the old growths soak up so much groundwater that rivers are drying up," wrote Tasmanian author Richard Flanagan, in an article in the UK Guardian last year. Flanagan described what's happening as "an incomprehensible ecological tragedy".

Tasmania's swamp gum tree (*Eucalyptus regnans*) is the world's largest flowering tree. Swamp gums can reach 85 metres in height and can live for several hundred years. The forests also include myrtle, sassafras and celery top pine. Senator Bob Brown, leader of the Australian Green Party, describes Tasmania's forests as "some of the most magnificent forests on Earth".

Since 1970, Tasmania has been exporting its forests as woodchips to Asian pulp and paper companies. Every year Tasmania exports about 5.5 million tonnes of woodchips and every year Tasmania's timber industry logs more than 20,000 hectares of forest. Today, only about 20 per cent of the area of ancient, tall forests remains. More than half of what is left is threatened by logging.

The industry isn't even good for jobs. While logging companies' profits have soared, increased mechanisation has meant the loss of more than 5,000 jobs in the last 25 years.

Tasmania's forests have seen some of the world's most courageous and determined environmental campaigns. For decades people have resisted the corporate destruction of their forests. They have been threatened with violence, arrested and attacked. In November 2003, Greenpeace and the Wilderness Society launched the Global Rescue station, a platform 65 metres up a swamp gum tree in the Styx Valley, in an area of forest known to the timber company Gunns Limited as coupe SX13C.

Formed by the brothers John and Thomas Gunn in 1875, Gunns now dominates Tasmania's

woodchip industry. Gunns owns 180,000 hectares of land and manages 100,000 hectares of plantations. The company employs more than 1,200 people and last year made a profit of A\$105 million.

In 2000, Gunns bought Boral's Tasmanian woodchipping business and the following year they bought forestry company North Forest Products. Since then, Gunns has had a near monopoly on Tasmanian woodchip exports.

Writing in the 2004 Annual Report, Gunns' Executive Chairman, John Gay, stated, "The Company is committed to sustainable forestry operations." But when TV journalist Graham Davis asked Gay about protected species being poisoned by 1080, Gay replied, "Well, there's too many of them and we need to keep them at a reasonable level."

Gunns' major shareholders include Concord Capital, Deutsche Bank, Perpetual Trustees Australia and AMP. The company's major customers in Japan include Mitsubishi Paper Mills, Oji Paper, Daio Paper, Chuetso Paper and Nippon Paper. Last year, Mitsubishi announced that it would stop buying woodchips from Tasmanian old-growth forests "as soon as possible".

In June 2004, Gunns announced that it had hired Finnish forestry consulting firm Jaakko Pöyry to carry out a six-month feasibility study into developing an 800,000 tonnes a year pulp mill. It is to be "the world's greenest pulp mill," according to Gunn's web-site.

But the mill will consume about three million tonnes of wood a year. Gunns will run the mill 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The pressure to continue logging Tasmania's forests will increase.

People living near the proposed mill are concerned about air and water pollution from the mill. In the Tamar Valley, where the pulp mill is proposed to be built, meteorological and topographic conditions frequently combine to trap pollution in the valley. Les Rochester, spokesperson for the Tamar Residents Action Committee, points out that, "The region already has one of the highest levels of particulate pollution in the world."

Gunns, however, appears not to be interested in listening to anyone's concerns. In December 2004, Gunns took out a lawsuit against 20 environmentalists, seeking damages totalling A\$6.3 million. Included in the writ are Senator Bob Brown, the Wilderness Society and Doctors for Forests, a group of doctors concerned about the affects of forestry chemicals on human health.

The day after Gunns filed the writ, about 700 people protested in Hobart against Gunns' attempt to silence its critics. In a speech at the protest, author Richard Flanagan said, "This writ redefines the practice of democracy as the crime of conspiracy. This is not about conservation, nor is it about Tasmania. It is a fundamental assault on our liberties. We ought to be frightened by what it speaks of and be prepared to fight it and fight it and never give up fighting it."

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