

Tasmanian Timber Industry Jobs Update

Timber Workers for Forests

October 2002

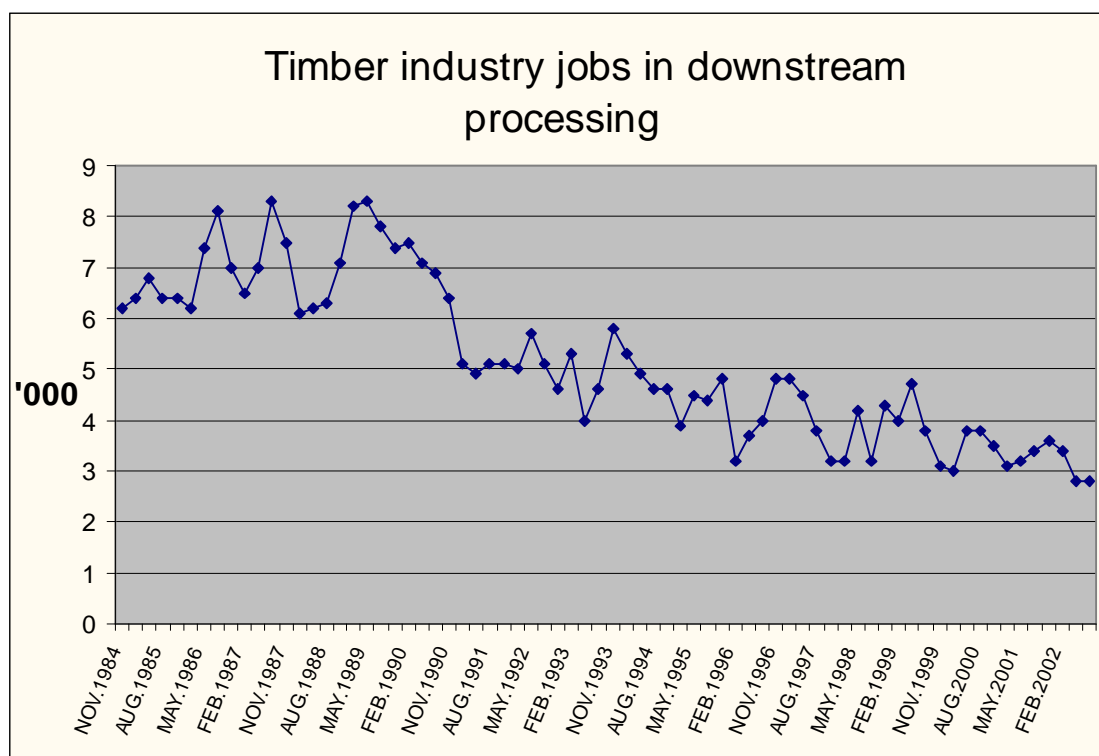
Jobs in ‘downstream processing’ of timber products in Tasmania reached a new low recently despite assurances from the deputy premier earlier this month that he would “not stand by and watch the loss of timber worker’s jobs”. Latest Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show that people employed in *wood and paper products manufacturing* is now 2,800 which is down 600 jobs from February 2002 and down 800 jobs in the year since November 2001. The timber industry manufacturing jobs have **halved** from 5,700 in the 10 years since 1992 (Table 1 and Figure 1)

Table 1: Jobs in downstream processing – Tasmanian timber industry

Date	Timber industry manufacturing jobs
August 2002	2,800
February 2002	3,400
November 2001	3,600
May 1992	5,700

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics quarterly labour force data 6291.0.40.001

Figure 1: Tasmanian timber industry jobs in downstream processing

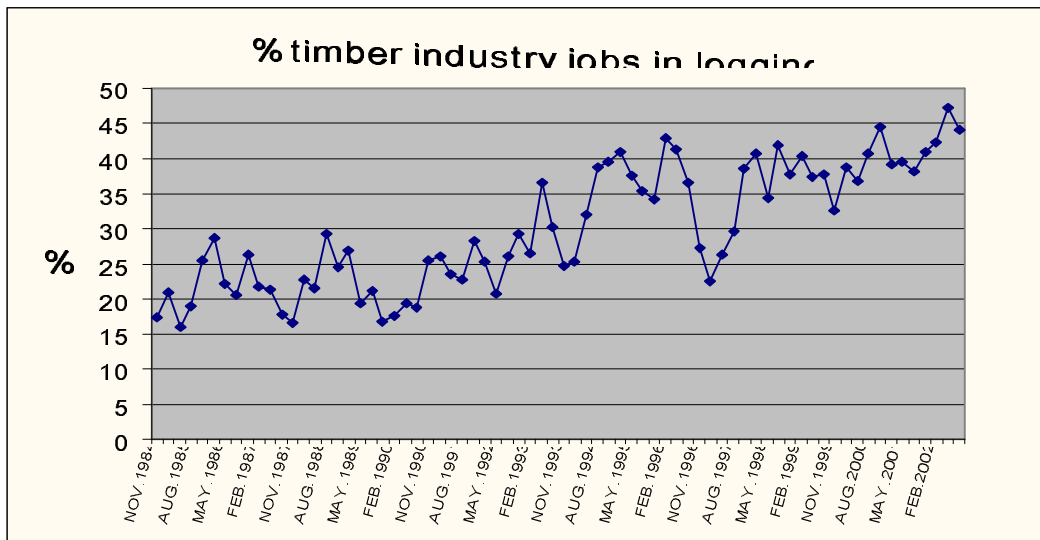


Under the government’s current forest policy there is no way the downward slide in jobs can be curtailed because clear-felling, mechanisation and export woodchips just do not create jobs. The timber industry has lost the equivalent of ‘three southwoods’ (which promised 200 jobs) in the last quarter. At 2,800 jobs, wood and paper manufacturing employs just 1.4% of the 200,200 strong Tasmanian workforce or just 0.6% of the Tasmanian population. Jobs in the industry are well below those employed in tourism – 18,500.

Logging rather than downstream processing has come of age in Tasmania. 47% of timber industry jobs are now in logging, whereas 10 years ago just 16% of timber industry jobs were in logging (Figure 2). This trend demonstrates that many of Tasmania’s skilled craftsmen have already been displaced by the mechanisation and automation that industrial-scale forestry creates. If this trend continues Tasmania’s ‘third world’ reputation as an outpost of unskilled labour and a mine for unprocessed timber products will become entrenched and most of the value adding and jobs opportunities will continue to go offshore and our skills base will continue to be eroded.

Ironically, the more our quality native forests continue to be replaced with plantation or regrowth pulpwood on short logging rotations the less opportunity there will be for future development or expansion of a ‘skills-based’ industry that requires premium slow grown uniquely Tasmanian timbers.

Figure 2: Percentage of Tasmanian timber industry jobs that are in logging



What needs to be done to turn around this unacceptable situation?

- If we are to continue harvesting timber from native forests, we must shift to local value adding and downstream processing using small volumes of world-class timber. This is the best chance of creating jobs from native forests on a sustainable basis. Local wooden boat building, furniture making, the craft wood industry, bee-keepers and other small operators would see their future secured as the Tasmanian reputation for excellence in high quality production was reinforced and extended. Such workers contribute greatly to Tasmanian society, culture and economy.
- We need to promote alternative native forest management options that will foster long-term growth in the industry whilst sustaining the environment on which it relies. In this way, we will create industries that will fit with the Tasmanian “brand” of a clean, green and clever community. In turn, this strategy will enhance the growth of a sustainable tourist industry, catering for the discerning and intelligent visitor and traveller.
- Immediate cessation of clear-felling in old growth forests and all other native forests from which a better economic and social return (than given by woodchipping) can be achieved. Workers immediately affected, of which there are some 325, to be immediately transferred to harvesting and processing of plantation timber or employed to develop appropriate selective harvesting methods.
- Significantly reduce the export of unprocessed material, such as woodchips and whole logs, sourced from native forests to provide maximum potential for jobs growth in Tasmania by developing industries that can process the timber here.
- Certify our forest products to accepted international standard so that buyers of our products can be assured that timber is sourced from ecologically sustainable forest management.

The alternatives listed above and a means to make the transition to a restructured timber industry in Tasmania is treated in detail in the publication ‘Tasmanian Timber Industry Jobs’ by Timber Workers for Forests – download from their web site www.southcom.com.au/~twff.

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