

Tasmanian forests under threat**GREENPEACE**

Peaceful protesters with authorities during a successful blockade by activists with 'tree sits' preventing the movement of machinery used in ancient forest destruction in the Styx Valley, Tasmania ©Greenpeace

Devastation in the Styx Valley, Tasmania, Australia caused by the logging of Gunns Ltd, 12 November 2003
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The Styx Valley in south-west Tasmania, Australia houses the world's tallest hardwood trees and flowering plants. The Eucalyptus regnans or "swamp gums" in the Styx stand up to 96.5 metres tall and are second in height only to the famous Redwood trees of North America (softwoods).¹ Many are over 400 years old and up to five metres wide at the base. Also known as the Valley of the Giants, the Styx is one of the most precious ancient forests in Tasmania and is recognised for its World Heritage qualities. These ancient forests are now under threat. In 1997, only 13 percent of the original cover of Eucalyptus regnans remained as ancient forest in Tasmania. Less than half of that is protected in national parks and proper reserves.

Also under threat in Tasmania is the Tarkine, which is the largest temperate rainforest in Australia. These forests are home to endangered and rare species like the majestic Wedge-Tailed Eagle and Spotted Tail Quoll, the grey goshawk, bettongs, bats, wombats and possums; as well as limestone caves, wild rivers and waterfalls.

The Regional Forest Agreement signed by the Tasmanian government in 1997 failed to protect these precious areas. Instead, the Styx forest is being clearcut for woodchips and the Tarkine is about to be logged. Gunns Ltd is the company responsible for the clearcutting and destruction of old growth forests in Tasmania and exports the majority of its woodchips to Japan.²

Gunns is the largest hardwood woodchip company in the world. Oji, Nippon and Mitsubishi in Japan are the three major international buyers of Tasmanian export woodchips. A smaller percent of wood from Tasmania's ancient forest is exported to Europe as sawn timber.

The main form of logging is clearcutting and burning. Logging operations are preceded by cutting down all of the trees, including the smaller species. The so-called 'useful' timber is removed, primarily destined for woodchips. The area is then bombed from the air with incendiaries to ensure the whole area burns and all remaining foliage is completely destroyed, including the seed banks of non-profitable rainforest tree species, so that they cannot regenerate. 1080 poison is then spread amongst the blackened mess to ensure that possums and wallabies are killed before they graze on re-sprouting seedlings. This inevitably kills other 'non-target' species such as bettongs, quolls and wombats. The area is reseeded with commercially profitable species and the diversity of the forest is lost. Most clearfelled forest in Tasmania is converted into plantation.



Species like this endemic tree high Pandani plant are being lost to logging destruction in Tasmania.
(c)Pekny/Greenpeace/st

¹ Global Rescue for the Tallest Hardwood Trees on Earth. Greenpeace Briefing Paper, November 2003.

² WWW.greenpeace.or.jp/cyberaction/tasmania

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Ancient forest situated in Styx Valley, Tasmania, Australia. Many forests like this one are being slated for logging to meet the woodchip demand by Japanese companies.
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Woodchips not wilderness

Ninety-two percent of wood extracted from state forest becomes woodchips, while 3.5 percent becomes sawn timber. The total amount of wood chipped from Tasmanian forests in 2000 reached 5.3 million tones. From 2001, the release of these figures became prohibited. Although the government and the industry argue that woodchips are a waste product of logging for building timber, 84 percent of all logs extracted from state forest go directly to the wood chipper. Only 16 percent goes to sawmills. About two-thirds of this 16 percent ends up as waste and is also sent to the woodchipper.

The myth of protection

The Tasmanian government claims that 95 percent of Tasmania's wilderness is protected from logging. This is misleading, as most of the famous World Heritage area to which they refer is not forested. Of the forested parts of Tasmania's wilderness, 30 percent remains threatened by logging. This includes most of the tall forests. Only 25 percent of Tasmania's original extent of ancient forest remains. Yet ancient forests continue to be cleared.

Protect Life on Earth

Life on the planet is rapidly disappearing, our forests are being destroyed and our oceans are being depleted. Local peoples are being robbed of the natural resources they need for their survival. At this year's CBD governments must stop this destruction and honour the commitments they have already made to stop the trend of biodiversity loss. Governments must provide money for this urgently needed protection instead of wasting it on wars and activities that ultimately end life rather than protect it. Instead of having endless discussions about the devastation, governments must stop the destruction now. As the future guardians of the planet, we have the right to receive a planet rich in life.

A National Park for the Styx

Greenpeace would like to see the Styx Valley protected as a "Styx Valley of the Giants National Park", covering 15,000 hectares as part of an expanded state-wide reserve system that protects all of Tasmania's ancient forests. The broader protection plan should take in the Tarkine, South-West, North-East Highlands, Great Western Tiers and other areas of Tasmanian forest- a total of some 240,000 hectares of public forests.