

## Reducing Reliance on Clear-Felling in Old-Growth Forests

**The Tasmanian and Australian governments have agreed to cooperate in a program to facilitate a significant reduction in the use of clear-fall harvesting in old-growth forests. Already, most harvesting operations in dry eucalypt forest, high altitude forests and rainforests are by selective harvesting, in which a large proportion of the forest is left standing to provide shelter, habitat and seed sources. The new program will focus on extending this alternative silviculture to the wet eucalypt forests in the State's public forest.**

In seeking to strengthen the sustainable management of old-growth forests, in line with advice from leading conservation biologists and silviculturists, non-clear-felling techniques will be phased in so that by 2010 no more than 20 per cent of the small area of old growth harvested each year in Tasmanian State forests will be clear-felled. The increase in the use of non-clear-felling techniques will reduce the extent of clear-felling from the current 50 per cent to 20 per cent of the annual old-growth harvest.

It is not possible to eliminate all clear-fall harvesting of old-growth forest and meet the governments' objectives of maintaining industry employment and not compromising acceptable worker standards. A mix of forest harvesting techniques, including clear-felling where appropriate, has been recommended by independent scientists.

In 'A Sustainable Future for Tasmania', the Australian Government agreed to invest \$2 million to research alternatives to clear-felling, to increase forest yield and provide sustainable forest jobs. This investment will add to the \$11.1 million committed by the Tasmanian Government to further research and implementation, including training and support for harvesting contractors.

The Tasmanian Government policy to reduce clear-felling of old growth is supported by a research program based at the Warra Long Term Ecological Research Site in southern Tasmania. This research, including operational trials, will be accelerated by the additional joint investment and will now be able to cover:

- other forest types in other parts of the State;
- broader issues associated with alternatives to clear-felling of native forest, including occupational health and safety; and
- intensive silviculture management practices that will increase timber yields.

A panel of internationally recognised experts in forest and conservation science will be established to review and provide advice to Forestry Tasmania on the progress in practical implementation of these silvicultural alternatives against international best practice standards.

The Australian Government-funded research will be managed jointly by the Australian and Tasmanian governments.

Harvest residue management is a key issue in the introduction of new silvicultural techniques. Under a non-clear-fall silviculture regime, burning of harvest residues on the forest floor will be more difficult. To this end, the Tasmanian and Australian governments note that the use of forest harvest residues as a feedstock for biomass energy plants will improve the overall efficiency of resource use, reduce forest fire hazard and assist regeneration under non-clear-fall silviculture techniques. Plans for a biomass energy plant in southern Tasmania will be progressed by the Tasmanian Government with the proponent.

The Office of the Renewable Energy Regulator has indicated that the use of harvest residues as a fuel source can be assessed as native forest wood waste and therefore may be eligible for Renewable Energy Certificates under the current Mandatory Renewable Energy Target (MRET) scheme. The Australian Government has confirmed the continued eligibility of native forest wood waste under the MRET scheme, providing the wood waste is sourced from sustainable forestry operations such as those accredited through the Regional Forest Agreement process.

The Tasmanian Government will invest in safety and training of forest workers to ensure successful implementation of the new silviculture management.

The additional funding being provided to road and industry infrastructure under the RFA Supplementary Agreement will support the implementation of the new silvicultural approach for old-growth harvesting.