

Jobs and forest-based industries

The native forests of the Gippsland region support a range of industries, including forestry and wood products, tourism, mineral production, grazing and beekeeping.

Timber production

Native forests

The hardwood sawmilling industry using wood from Gippsland directly generated about \$24.6 million in 1997-98 and contributed about \$46 million to the Victorian economy, taking flow-on effects into account. The pulpwood industry is a significant part of the regional hardwood industry but financial data are not available for commercial confidentiality reasons.

The region accounts for 14.4 per cent of the State's sawlog production, and 6.6 per cent of Victoria's total residual log production, producing 126,575 and 73,511 cubic metres respectively. It contributed around \$4.2 million in log revenue in 1997-98 or about 10.7 per cent of the total State forest log revenue received in that year.

The region's 20 hardwood mills are involved in a range of processing activities, including a high proportion of value added kiln dried and appearance grade products for both domestic and export markets. Two pulpwood processors have both residual logs allocations from the region, as well as taking sawmill residues.

The alpine ash and mountain ash forests produce half the region's sawlogs and the largest proportion of higher-grade logs. The region is a sizeable source of ash logs for the domestic saw milling and pulp and paper based industries, accounting for approximately nine per cent of the ash logs produced from Victorian State forests.

Plantations

While Victorian RFAs focus mainly on public native forests and where necessary private native forests, they also analyse the industry development potential of a region's plantations. Gippsland contains about 62,400 ha of hardwood plantations and 23,300 ha of softwood plantations. Most of the plantation estate is owned and managed by Australian Paper Plantations (54,000 ha) or Hancocks Victorian Plantations (26,000 ha). The region's plantations support industries in Maryvale, Morwell, Yarram and Moe. These industries process both softwood and hardwood sawlogs for a variety of products and residual roundwood for pulp and paper. At least seven smaller firms preserve pine roundwood. Some plantation material is exported as pulpwood through the Port of Geelong. Plantations supplied 450,000 cubic metres of sawlogs and 615,000 cubic metres of pulpwood to industry in 1997-98.

Jobs

The commercial forestry, sawmilling and residual log industries are estimated to provide 687 direct jobs including 199 in saw milling, 160 in residual log processing, 32 in commercial forest management, and 296 in logging and haulage. Taking flow on effects into account, 1,643 direct and indirect jobs are attributable to the region's hardwood resources. Taking into account the further processing of the region's native hardwood in such activities as furniture manufacturing, joinery and craft wood industries, the softwood and hardwood timber industries accounted for 3,643 direct jobs in the region in 1996, or around four per cent of total regional employment.

Tourism

The forests, rivers, lakes and ranges of the Gippsland region provide a wealth of natural attractions, including two of Victoria's most popular tourist destinations – Wilsons Promontory National Park and the Gippsland Lakes.

Recreation on public land includes boating, fishing, surfing, diving, forest drives, bushwalking, picnicking, camping, cross country skiing, white-water rafting and four-wheel driving. Developed attractions including historic towns such as Walhalla, gourmet agricultural produce and industry-related products add to the region's appeal, with the Great Alpine Road and other routes linking regional attractions and activities.

In 1995, the Gippsland Natural Discovery region received 937,000 visitors, who spent a total of 2.42 million visitor nights in the region, or five per cent of the Victorian total. Most tourists were Victorians.

Tourism makes a significant economic contribution to many local centres, with visitors spending around \$69 million annually in the Gippsland Natural Discovery region. In 1995/96, cultural, recreational, personal and other services directly employed over 10,200 people or 10.4 per cent of the region's total employment. This does not include the contribution of tourism and recreation to the retail and wholesale industries, which combined were Gippsland's largest employers of about 18,300 in 1995-96 people, or 18.5 per cent of the region's total workforce.

Other forest industries

The region's forests also provide minor forest produce such as posts and poles, other hewn timber, firewood, wood chop blocks and specialty timbers. Other uses include grazing, apiculture, mineral exploration and mining.

Minerals

The major mining activity in the Gippsland region is the exploitation of brown coal which provide a major source of energy for electricity generation. Total brown coal reserves for the Gippsland Basin have been estimated at 96,300 million tonnes, while total resources have been calculated at over 172,874 million tonnes. While there are no significant operating metallic mines in the Gippsland region, exploration expenditure totalled about \$1.1 million in 1997-98 and mining expenditure totalled about \$102 million. The major commodity was gold, with interest also in copper and other minerals.

Apiary

Apiarists use the region's forests to produce honey, beeswax, pollen and royal jelly. Crop pollination is another important benefit of apiculture. Eucalypt species providing a basis for the region's eight annual and 385 temporary bee sites include Yellow Box, Red Ironbark, But But, Red Stringybark, Silvertop, Long-leaf Box, Snow Gum and Alpine Ash. In 1997-98, \$15,570 in revenue was received from beekeeping licenses and permits in Gippsland.

Grazing

In 1997-98, grazing licences covered over 470,000 hectares of public land in Gippsland returning around \$80,000 in revenue.