



Australian Government

**Department of Agriculture
and Water Resources**

ABARES

Australian plantation statistics 2018 update

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Research by the Australian Bureau of Agricultural
and Resource Economics and Sciences

May 2018



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Cataloguing data

Downham, R & Gavran, M 2018, *Australian plantation statistics 2018 update*, ABARES, Canberra, May. CC BY 4.0.

ISBN 978-1-74323-379-5

ISSN 2204-9754 (Online)

ABARES project 43515

Internet

This publication is available at agriculture.gov.au/abares/publications.

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Acknowledgements

Data and information for this report were provided by the many companies, government agencies, other organisations and individuals who own or manage plantations, and by regional private forestry organisations. The plantation and timber industry associations that represent plantation owners assisted with data collection and provided advice as required. Their support and assistance is gratefully acknowledged.

About this report

ABARES has prepared this report under the auspices of the National Plantation Inventory (NPI). Under the NPI, ABARES has surveyed public and private plantation growers and managers to collect data on commercial plantations established primarily for wood production in Australia since 1993.

Australian plantation statistics is published every year. It supports strategic forest industry planning and decision-making by presenting information on total plantation area, new planting and ownership. These updates complement two other NPI information products published by ABARES—the five-yearly comprehensive spatial stocktake of Australia’s commercial plantation estate report and the five-yearly comprehensive log supply forecast report. NPI data are subsequently reported in other national publications, including the bi-annual ABARES *Australian forest and wood products statistics*, the five-yearly *Australia’s State of the Forests Report* and the annual Australian Bureau of Statistics *Year Book Australia*.

In this report, plantation areas are presented by NPI region (Map 1) for softwood and hardwood plantation types, species and jurisdiction, based on data collected from private growers and grower representatives and public state and territory agencies. The survey that underpins this report collects information on the total plantation estate and newly established plantations on land not previously used for plantations. Plantations are added if they have not been previously recorded, revised if earlier data were in error and removed if the land has been converted to another use such as agriculture.

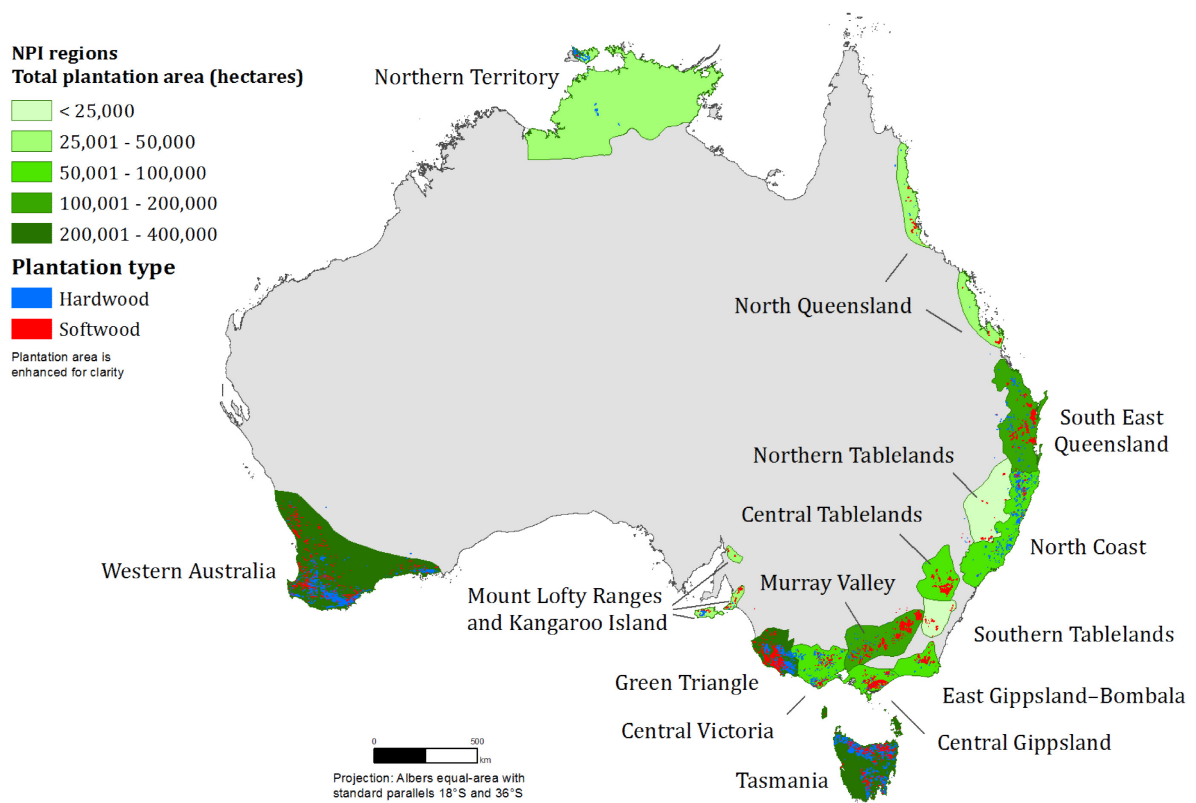
A substantial area of plantations is harvested each year and some areas are not replanted. Replanting might not take place for some time after harvesting; unless advised of a change in land use, the NPI records such fallow land as plantation. Although all care is taken to reconcile data, discrepancies may occur in area reported from year to year.

Grower information submitted to the NPI is confidential. For reporting purposes, data from individual growers and managers are aggregated within NPI regions or states and territories and are not provided individually to other parties without the consent of the data owner.

The data presented in this report do not capture all small-scale and farm forestry plantings but do include farm forestry plantings reported in *Australian plantation statistics 2011* (Gavran & Parsons 2011).

In this report, 2016–17 data are compared with data from the 2006–07, 2011–12 and 2015–16 plantation reports. The totals in some tables may not tally exactly due to rounding. The term ‘ownership’ refers to tree ownership, unless otherwise stated.

Map 1 National Plantation Inventory regions (regional hubs)



Source: ABARES

Summary

Australia's total commercial plantation area was approximately 1,955,100 hectares in 2016–17, a decrease of 19,700 hectares (1.0 per cent) from 1,974,800 hectares in 2015–16. These plantations are located within the 15 NPI regions that also contain the vast majority of regional processing facilities (regional hubs) based on plantations.

In 2016–17 the total area of softwood plantations was approximately 1,036,900 hectares, an increase of around 100 hectares from 2015–16. The total area of hardwood plantations was approximately 908,500 hectares, a decrease of around 19,800 hectares (2.1 per cent) since 2015–16.

In 2016–17 Victoria continued to have the largest total area of commercial plantations of Australia's states and territories (421,700 hectares), followed by New South Wales (394,400 hectares) and Western Australia (367,900 hectares).

The total area of new plantations established in 2016–17 was approximately 200 hectares, with half being hardwood and half softwood. All of the new plantations established in 2016–17 were privately owned.

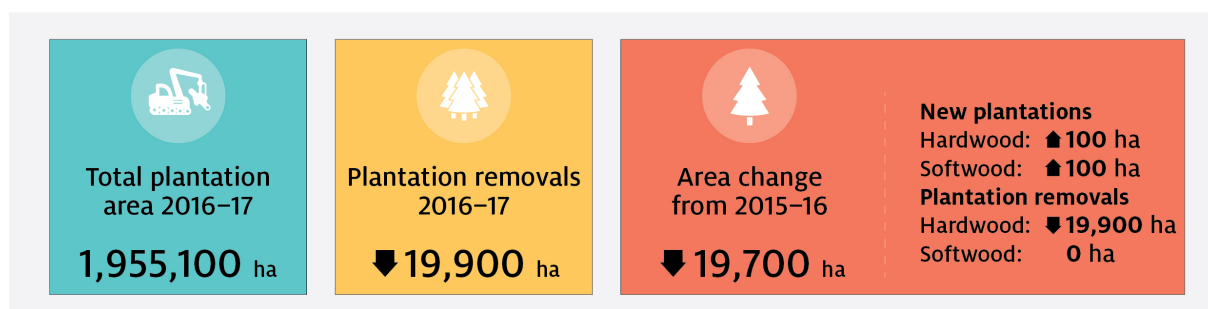
In 2016–17 approximately 19,900 hectares of Australia's plantation estate was converted to another land use, all from hardwood plantations and the majority (78 per cent) in Western Australia. The largest plantation removals occurred in 2009–10 (38,800 hectares) and 2014–15 (35,200 hectares), all from hardwood plantations.

In 2016–17 there was approximately 1,485,500 hectares of privately owned plantations, representing 76.0 per cent of the total plantation estate. Public plantations accounted for 20.4 per cent (398,600 hectares) and jointly owned (joint partnerships between state forest agencies and leasehold and freehold land owners) plantations represented 3.6 per cent (71,000 hectares) of the total plantation estate.

The ownership structure of plantations remained relatively unchanged between 2015–16 and 2016–17. In 2016–17 institutional investors owned 49 per cent of the total plantation area, governments owned 21 per cent, farm foresters and other private growers owned 21 per cent, managed investment schemes owned 5 per cent, and timber industry companies owned 4 per cent.

In 2016–17 the hardwood plantation estate was dominated by Tasmanian blue gum (51.7 per cent) and shining gum (25.7 per cent), both of which are managed primarily for pulplog production.

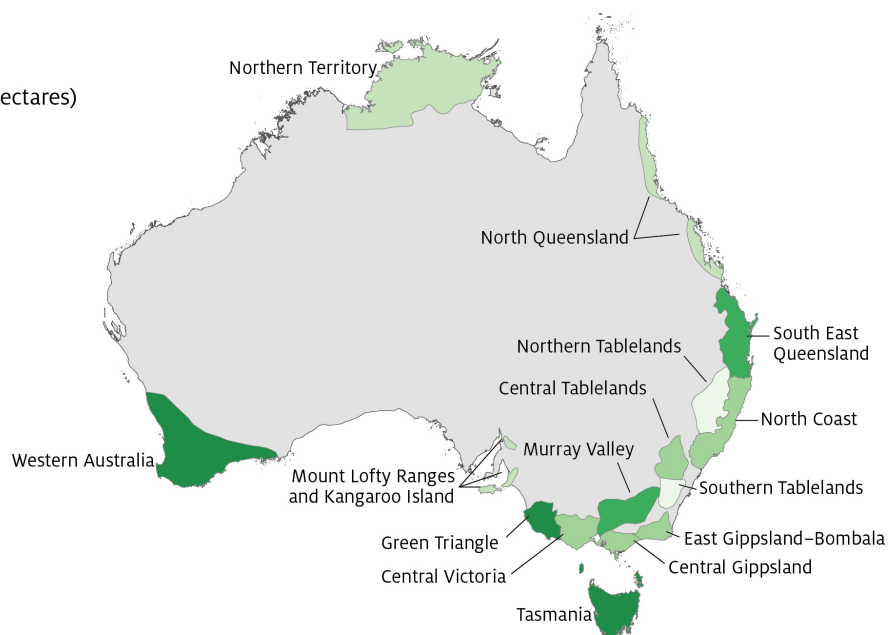
In 2016–17 the softwood plantation estate was dominated by radiata pine (74.5 per cent) and southern pines (15.1 per cent), both of which are managed for sawlog production.



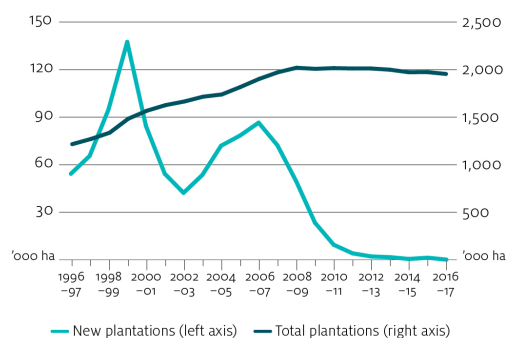
NPI regions

Total plantation area (hectares)

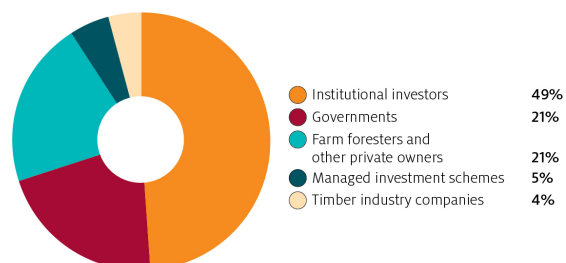
- <25,000
- 25,001–50,000
- 50,001–100,000
- 100,001–200,000
- 200,001–400,000



Total and new plantation area



Plantation ownership 2016–17



Note: Totals may not tally exactly due to rounding.
Source: ABARES

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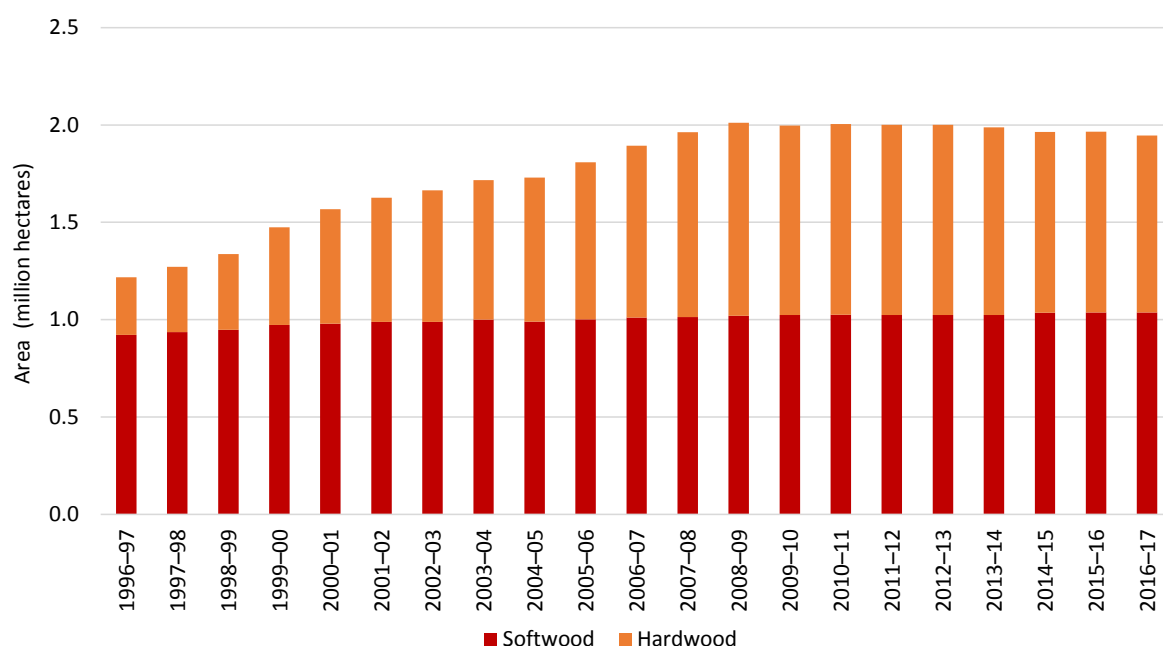
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1 Characteristics of the commercial plantation estate

Total plantation estate

Australia's total commercial plantation area was approximately 1,955,100 hectares in 2016–17, as reported by plantation growers and managers, a decrease of 19,700 hectares (1.0 per cent) from 1,974,800 hectares in 2015–16 (Figure 1). These plantations are located within the 15 NPI regions that also contain the vast majority of regional processing facilities (regional hubs) based on plantations.

Figure 1 Total plantation area, by type, 1996–97 to 2016–17



Note: Data for 1996–97 to 2004–05 are for calendar years representing 1997 to 2005; data for 2005–06 to 2016–17 are for financial years. 'Other' category plantations are not included.

Source: ABARES

In 2016–17 the total area of softwood plantations was approximately 1,036,900 hectares, an increase of around 100 hectares from 2015–16, and accounted for 53 per cent of total commercial plantation area. The total area of hardwood plantations was approximately 908,500 hectares, a decrease of around 19,800 hectares (2.1 per cent) since 2015–16, and accounted for more than 46 per cent of total commercial plantation area. The 'other' category (mixed plantations and unknown species) remained unchanged at 9,700 hectares, representing less than 1 per cent of total commercial plantation area (Table 1).

Between 2015–16 and 2016–17 the total commercial plantation area decreased in Western Australia, South Australia and Victoria, while remaining relatively unchanged in all other states and territories. Total commercial plantation area in Western Australia decreased by 4.0 per cent (15,500 hectares), South Australia by 1.6 per cent (2,900 hectares) and Victoria by 0.3 per cent (1,300 hectares) (Table 2). Table 3 provides a further breakdown of plantation area by NPI region.

Table 1 Overview of Australia's plantation estate, 2006–07, 2011–12, 2015–16 and 2016–17

Overview of total plantation area	2006–07	2011–12	2015–16	2016–17	Change between 2015–16 and 2016–17
	('000 ha)	('000 ha)	('000 ha)	('000 ha)	(%)
Hardwood	883.5	976.7	928.3	908.5	-2.1
Softwood	1,010.2	1,023.6	1,036.8	1,036.9	0.0
Other a	9.3	12.3	9.7	9.7	0.0
Total	1,902.9	2,012.6	1,974.8	1,955.1	-1.0

a Other includes mixed hardwood and softwood species and plantations for which species were not reported.

Note: All columns and rows have been rounded, so column totals may not tally.

Source: ABARES

Table 2 Plantation area, by state/territory, 2006–07, 2011–12, 2015–16 and 2016–17

Plantation area by state/territory	2006–07	2011–12	2015–16	2016–17	Change between 2015–16 and 2016–17
	('000 ha)	('000 ha)	('000 ha)	('000 ha)	(%)
New South Wales	359.1	391.9	394.4	394.4	0.0
Victoria	411.9	433.6	423.0	421.7	-0.3
Queensland	240.3	233.3	230.4	230.4	0.0
South Australia	178.3	188.5	178.8	175.9	-1.6
Western Australia	403.7	405.1	383.4	367.9	-4.0
Tasmania	274.2	310.7	309.8	309.9	0.0
Northern Territory	25.9	41.8	47.6	47.5	-0.1
Australian Capital Territory	9.5	7.7	7.4	7.4	0.0

Source: ABARES

Table 3 Plantation area, by National Plantation Inventory region, 2006–07, 2011–12, 2015–16 and 2016–17

Plantation area by NPI region a	2006–07 (’000 ha)	2011–12 (’000 ha)	2015–16 (’000 ha)	2016–17 (’000 ha)	Change between 2015–16 and 2016–17 (%)
Western Australia	403.7	405.1	383.4	367.9	-4.0
Northern Territory	25.9	41.8	47.6	47.5	-0.1
Mount Lofty Ranges and Kangaroo Island (South Australia)	35.7	34.1	33.4	33.4	0.0
Green Triangle (South Australia/Victoria)	322.1	348.1	336.6	333.9	-0.8
North Queensland	36.9	38.4	36.6	36.6	0.0
South East Queensland	200.9	194.4	191.7	191.7	0.0
Northern Tablelands (New South Wales)	17.5	24.4	17.5	17.5	0.0
North Coast (New South Wales)	81.9	101.0	94.5	94.5	0.0
Central Tablelands (New South Wales)	81.0	82.1	87.7	87.7	0.0
Southern Tablelands (New South Wales)	23.6	22.1	22.1	22.1	0.0
Murray Valley (New South Wales/Victoria)	194.4	195.3	197.0	197.0	0.0
Central Victoria	60.5	68.5	67.8	66.9	-1.3
Central Gippsland (Victoria)	97.8	96.0	91.7	91.2	-0.6
East Gippsland–Bombala (Victoria/New South Wales)	46.7	51.5	57.4	57.4	0.0
Tasmania	274.2	310.7	309.8	309.9	0.0

a NPI region locations are shown in Map 1.

Source: ABARES

The highest reported hardwood plantation area in the history of the NPI was 990,900 hectares in 2008–09, representing 49 per cent of the total plantation estate. Over the last nine years, Australia's hardwood plantation area decreased by 8 per cent (82,500 hectares) to 908,500 hectares in 2016–17. The majority of this decrease occurred in Western Australia (50,900 hectares) and Queensland (28,800 hectares). The Northern Territory was a major exception, as its hardwood plantation area increased by 54 percent (16,000 hectares) over this period. Australia's decreasing hardwood plantation area is due to plantation growers and managers returning unproductive plantation land to agriculture or to lessors on the expiration of hardwood plantation lease agreements.

State and territory highlights

In 2016–17 Victoria continued to have the largest total area of commercial plantations of Australia's states and territories (421,700 hectares), followed by New South Wales (394,400 hectares) and Western Australia (367,900 hectares) (Table 4).

Western Australia accounted for the largest proportion of Australia's hardwood plantations (29 per cent), followed by Tasmania (26 per cent) and Victoria (22 per cent). The majority of softwood plantations are located in New South Wales (30 per cent), Victoria (22 per cent) and Queensland (19 per cent).

Table 4 Plantation area, by state/territory and type, 2016–17

State/territory	Hardwood ('000 ha)	Softwood ('000 ha)	Other ('000 ha)	Total ('000 ha)
New South Wales	87.1	307.1	0.1	394.4
Victoria	197.5	223.4	0.8	421.7
Queensland	34.8	195.5	0.1	230.4
South Australia	48.5	127.2	0.2	175.9
Western Australia	260.9	98.4	8.5	367.9
Tasmania	233.9	75.9	0.0	309.9
Northern Territory	45.6	1.9	0.0	47.5
Australian Capital Territory	0.0	7.4	0.0	7.4
Total	908.5	1,036.9	9.7	1,955.1

Note: All columns and rows have been rounded, so totals may not tally.

Source: ABARES

New plantations

New plantations are those established on land not previously used for plantation forestry. The total area of new plantations established in 2016–17 was approximately 200 hectares, with half being hardwood and half softwood (Table 5). All of the new plantations established in 2016–17 were privately owned.

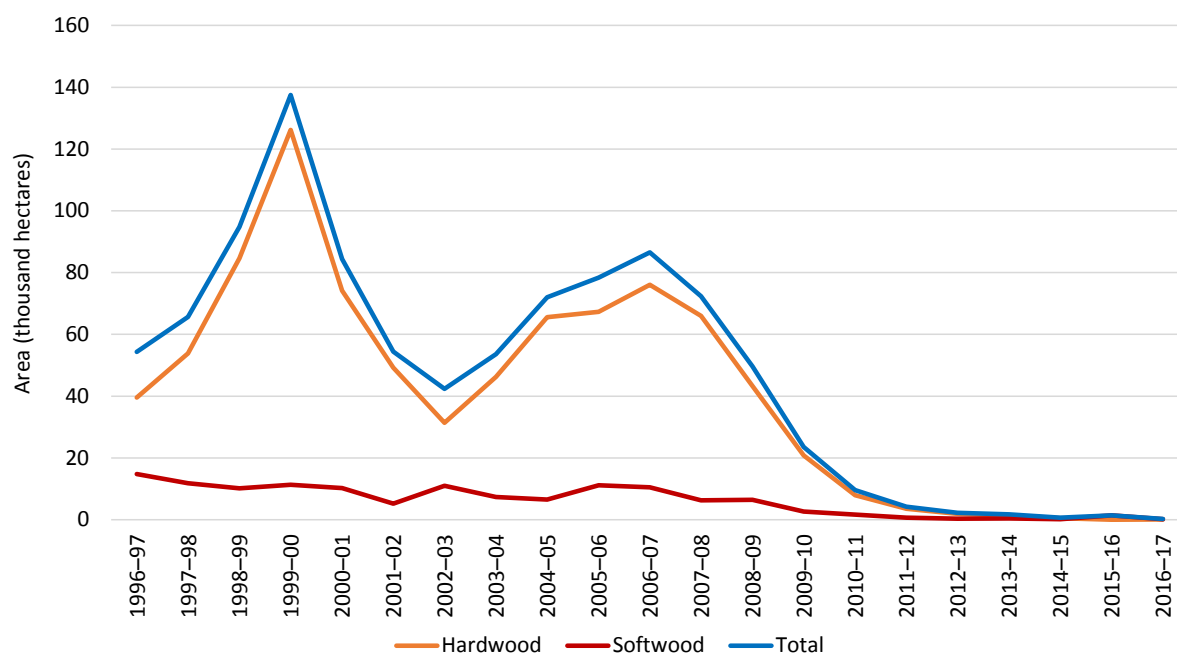
Table 5 New plantation area, by state/territory, 2006–07, 2011–12, 2015–16 and 2016–17

State/territory	2006–07 (’000 ha)	2011–12 (’000 ha)	2015–16 (’000 ha)	2016–17 (’000 ha)
New South Wales	13.6	0.4	1.4	0.0
Victoria	16.2	1.0	0.0	0.1
Queensland	7.7	0.8	0.0	0.0
South Australia	7.3	0.0	0.0	0.0
Western Australia	15.0	0.4	0.0	0.1
Tasmania	26.5	0.1	0.0	0.0
Northern Territory	0.2	1.6	0.0	0.0
Australian Capital Territory	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	86.6	4.2	1.4	0.2

Note: New plantations are those established on land not previously used for plantation forestry. All columns and rows have been rounded, so totals may not tally.

Source: ABARES

The annual plantation establishment rate has changed significantly over the last two decades and has followed a decreasing trend since 2006–07 (Figure 2). The establishment rate decreased from 86,600 hectares in 2006–07 to 200 hectares in 2016–17, the lowest ever recorded under the NPI.

Figure 2 New plantations, by type, 1996–97 to 2016–17


Note: Data for 1996–97 to 2004–05 are for calendar years representing 1997 to 2005; data for 2005–06 to 2016–17 are for financial years.

Source: ABARES

Annual establishment of new hardwood plantations has progressively declined from 76,100 hectares in 2006–07 to 100 hectares in 2016–17 and annual establishment of new softwood plantations decreased from 10,500 hectares in 2006–07 to 100 hectares in 2016–17 (Table 6).

Table 6 New plantation area, by type, 2006–07, 2011–12, 2015–16 and 2016–17

New plantations established ^a	2006–07 (’000 ha)	2011–12 (’000 ha)	2015–16 (’000 ha)	2016–17 (’000 ha)
Hardwood	76.1	3.5	0.0	0.1
Softwood	10.5	0.7	1.4	0.1

^a New plantations are those established on land not previously used for plantation forestry.

Source: ABARES

Plantation removal

Plantation growers and managers provided data on the area of commercial plantations converted to another land use over the last decade (Figure 3). In 2016–17 approximately 19,900 hectares of Australia’s plantation estate was converted to another land use, all from hardwood plantations and the majority (78 per cent) in Western Australia. Hardwood plantations accounted for most of the plantation area converted to another land use over the last decade. The largest plantation removals occurred in 2009–10 (38,800 hectares) and 2014–15 (35,200 hectares), all from hardwood plantations.

Figure 3 Area of plantations converted to another land use, by type, 2006–07 to 2016–17



Source: ABARES

Plantation ownership

In 2016–17 there was approximately 1,485,500 hectares of privately owned plantations, representing 76.0 per cent of the total plantation estate (Table 7). Public plantations accounted for 20.4 per cent (398,600 hectares) and jointly owned (joint partnerships between state forest agencies and leasehold and freehold land owners) plantations represented 3.6 per cent (71,000 hectares) of the total plantation estate.

New South Wales had the largest share of Australia's total public plantations (66 per cent), Victoria had the largest share of Australia's total private plantations (28 per cent) and Western Australia accounted for most of Australia's total jointly owned plantations (66 per cent) (Table 7).

Table 7 Total plantation area, by state/territory and ownership, 2016–17

State/territory	Unit	Joint a	Private	Public	Total
New South Wales	'000 ha	7.9	124.7	261.8	394.4
Victoria	'000 ha	0.1	419.1	2.5	421.7
Queensland	'000 ha	0.0	230.3	0.1	230.4
South Australia	'000 ha	0.0	160.7	15.3	175.9
Western Australia	'000 ha	46.9	244.8	76.3	367.9
Tasmania	'000 ha	16.2	258.4	35.2	309.9
Northern Territory	'000 ha	0.0	47.5	0.0	47.5
Australian Capital Territory	'000 ha	0.0	0.0	7.4	7.4
Total	'000 ha	71.0	1,485.5	398.6	1,955.1
Proportion of tree ownership	%	3.6	76.0	20.4	100.0

a Includes some small areas for which ownership details were not reported.

Note: All columns and rows have been rounded, so totals may not tally.

Source: ABARES

The ownership structure of plantations remained relatively unchanged between 2015–16 and 2016–17. In 2016–17 institutional investors owned 49 per cent of the total plantation area, governments owned 21 per cent, farm foresters and other private growers owned 21 per cent, managed investment schemes owned 5 per cent, and timber industry companies owned 4 per cent (Table 8).

Table 8 Plantation ownership, 2006–07, 2011–12, 2015–16 and 2016–17

Plantation owner	2006–07 (%)	2011–12 (%)	2015–16 (%)	2016–17 (%)
Institutional investors	12	32	49	49
Timber industry companies	9	13	4	4
Farm foresters and other private owners	10	8	21	21
Managed investment schemes	33	23	5	5
Governments	36	24	21	21

Note: Joint venture plantations are not included.

Source: ABARES

Major plantation species

Hardwood plantation species

In 2016–17 the hardwood plantation estate was dominated by Tasmanian blue gum (51.7 per cent) and shining gum (25.7 per cent), both of which are managed primarily for pulplog production (Table 9). These proportions are similar to those reported in previous years.

Most Tasmanian blue gum plantations are located in the Western Australia (50 per cent) and Green Triangle (South Australia/Victoria) (32 per cent) NPI regions. Most shining gum plantations are in the Tasmania NPI region (89 per cent).

Other hardwood plantation species include Dunn's white gum, which is managed primarily for pulplog production in the North Coast (New South Wales) (59 per cent) and South East Queensland (41 per cent) NPI regions (Table 9). Most blackbutt and flooded gum plantations are in the North Coast (New South Wales) NPI region (93 per cent) and most spotted gum plantations are in the North Coast (New South Wales) (50 per cent) and South East Queensland (43 per cent) NPI regions. Blackbutt, flooded gum and spotted gum are all managed primarily for sawlog production.

Softwood plantation species

In 2016–17 the softwood plantation estate was dominated by radiata pine (74.5 per cent) and southern pines (15.1 per cent), both of which are managed for sawlog production (Table 10). These proportions are similar to those reported in previous years.

Most radiata pine plantations are in the Murray Valley (New South Wales/Victoria) (24 per cent), Green Triangle (South Australia/Victoria) (23 per cent), Central Tablelands (New South Wales) (11 per cent) and Tasmania (10 per cent) NPI regions. Most southern pine plantations are in the South East Queensland NPI region (74 per cent). Other regionally important softwood species are maritime pine in the Western Australia NPI region and hoop pine in the South East Queensland NPI region.

Table 9 Major hardwood species, by National Plantation Inventory region, 2016–17

NPI region a	Unit	Tasmanian blue gum	Shining gum	Dunn's white gum	Blackbutt/ flooded gum	Spotted gum	Other eucalypts	Other species	Acacia species	Total
Western Australia	'000 ha	236.3	0.0	0.0	0.1	1.1	22.3	1.1	0.0	260.9
Northern Territory	'000 ha	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	14.4	31.2	45.6
Mount Lofty Ranges and Kangaroo Island (South Australia)	'000 ha	13.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.1	0.0	14.6
Green Triangle (South Australia/Victoria)	'000 ha	149.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	4.5	0.6	0.0	154.4
North Queensland	'000 ha	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	3.8	0.0	4.9
South East Queensland	'000 ha	0.0	0.0	12.1	1.4	8.6	5.9	1.7	0.1	29.8
Northern Tablelands (New South Wales)	'000 ha	0.0	1.3	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.9	0.0	0.0	2.3
North Coast (New South Wales)	'000 ha	0.1	3.1	17.4	23.4	9.9	25.0	0.6	0.0	79.6
Central Tablelands (New South Wales)	'000 ha	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1
Southern Tablelands (New South Wales)	'000 ha	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.2	0.4
Murray Valley (New South Wales/Victoria)	'000 ha	6.0	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.1	0.0	7.3
Central Victoria	'000 ha	30.8	3.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.2	0.1	0.0	36.8
Central Gippsland (Victoria)	'000 ha	13.7	10.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.9	0.0	0.0	29.2
East Gippsland–Bombala b (Victoria/New South Wales)	'000 ha	0.6	6.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.6	1.2	0.0	8.7
Tasmania	'000 ha	19.1	208.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.9	5.7	0.0	233.9
Total	'000 ha	469.8	233.6	29.5	25.1	19.9	69.6	29.3	31.6	908.5
Proportion of hardwood species	%	51.7	25.7	3.3	2.8	2.2	7.7	3.2	3.5	100

a NPI region locations are shown in Map 1. **b** Provisional data. Unknown plantations are not included.

Note: All columns and rows have been rounded, so totals may not tally.

Source: ABARES

Table 10 Major softwood species, by National Plantation Inventory region, 2016–17

NPI region a	Unit	Radiata pine	Southern pines	Hoop pine	Maritime pine	Other pines	Other species	Total
Western Australia	'000 ha	56.2	0.0	0.0	41.4	0.3	0.5	98.4
Northern Territory	'000 ha	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.9	0.0	1.9
Mount Lofty Ranges and Kangaroo Island (South Australia)	'000 ha	18.4	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.1	0.0	18.7
Green Triangle (South Australia/Victoria)	'000 ha	174.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.7	179.4
North Queensland	'000 ha	0.0	29.4	1.0	0.0	0.0	1.3	31.8
South East Queensland	'000 ha	0.8	115.8	43.5	0.0	1.0	0.7	161.8
Northern Tablelands (New South Wales)	'000 ha	13.5	0.1	0.0	0.0	1.3	0.2	15.2
North Coast (New South Wales)	'000 ha	0.3	11.0	0.6	0.0	2.5	0.4	14.8
Central Tablelands (New South Wales)	'000 ha	84.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.8	87.7
Southern Tablelands (New South Wales)	'000 ha	21.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	21.7
Murray Valley (New South Wales/Victoria)	'000 ha	187.1	0.0	0.0	0.2	1.8	0.5	189.7
Central Victoria	'000 ha	29.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.3	30.0
Central Gippsland (Victoria)	'000 ha	61.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	61.3
East Gippsland–Bombala b (Victoria/New South Wales)	'000 ha	48.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	48.7
Tasmania	'000 ha	75.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.2	75.9
Total	'000 ha	772.3	156.4	45.1	41.8	9.5	11.9	1,036.9
Proportion of softwood species	%	74.5	15.1	4.4	4.0	0.9	1.1	100.0

a NPI region locations are shown in Map 1. **b** Provisional data. Unknown plantations are not included.

Note: All columns and rows have been rounded, so totals may not tally.

Source: ABARES

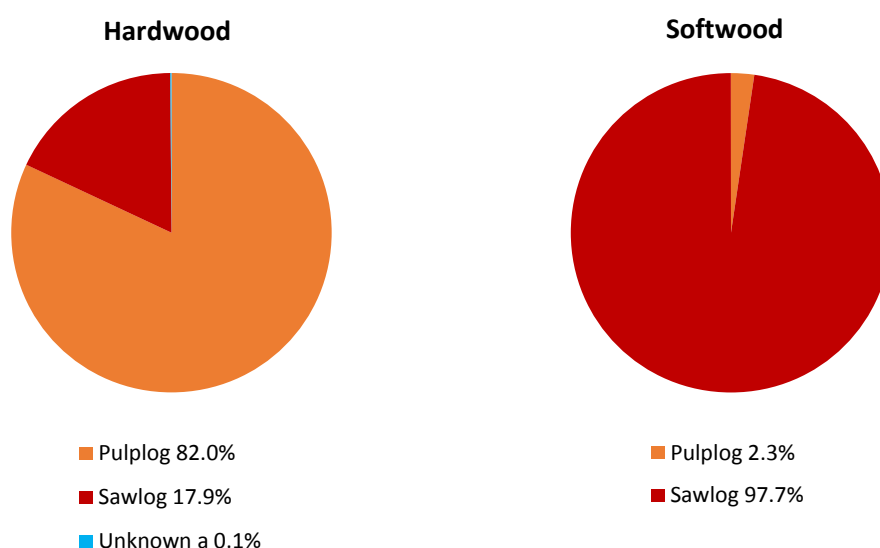
2 Logs harvested from plantations

Plantations managed for sawlogs and pulplogs

In 2016–17 almost all of Australia’s softwood plantations (97.7 per cent) were managed primarily to produce sawlogs for sawnwood—for products such as building and construction materials (Figure 4). Softwood pulplogs produced from thinnings and low-quality parts of the stem are used to produce engineered wood products, landscaping products and paper products.

In 2016–17 the majority of Australian hardwood plantations (82.0 per cent) were managed primarily to produce pulplogs for products such as woodchips and paper (Figure 4). In 2016–17 around 17.9 per cent of hardwood plantations were managed to produce sawlogs, mainly from the public plantation estate to supplement native forest sawlog production, for products such as flooring and structural timbers.

Figure 4 Proportion of plantations managed for sawlogs and pulplogs, 2016–17



^a Information on plantation management was insufficient, so it was not always possible to ascertain the main products.
Source: ABARES

Glossary

blackbutt	<i>Eucalyptus pilularis</i>
Dunn's white gum	<i>Eucalyptus dunnii</i>
flooded gum	<i>Eucalyptus grandis</i>
hoop pine	<i>Araucaria cunninghamii</i>
maritime pine	<i>Pinus pinaster</i>
radiata pine	<i>Pinus radiata</i>
shining gum	<i>Eucalyptus nitens</i>
southern pines	<i>Pinus caribaea, Pinus elliottii</i>
spotted gum	<i>Corymbia species</i>
Tasmanian blue gum	<i>Eucalyptus globulus</i>

References

Gavran, M & Parsons, M 2011, [Australian plantation statistics 2011](#), Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences, Canberra, August.