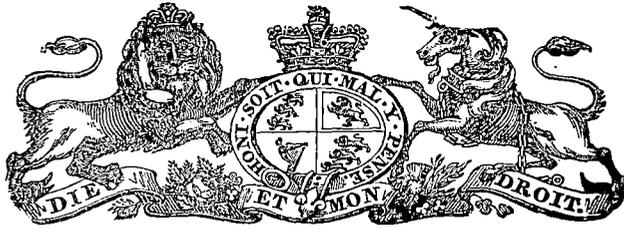


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PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA.

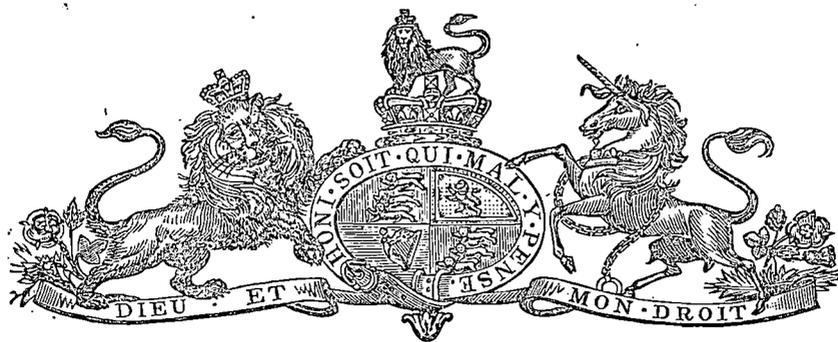
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CONSERVATOR OF FORESTS:

REPORT FOR YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 1889.

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Presented to both Houses of Parliament by His Excellency's Command.



## FOREST DEPARTMENT.

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SIR,

I HAVE the honor to submit to you the following Report of the Forest Department for the year ending 30th June, 1889 :—

1. The forests of Tasmania are administered under the provisions of the State Forest Act, 1885, taken together with the Waste Lands Act. Under the provisions of the former Act I was appointed Conservator by the Governor in Council on the 15th April, in succession to Mr. G. S. Perrin, who had resigned the appointment. Under the latter Act there have been 42 Crown Bailiffs appointed, part of whose duties consists in work connected with the custody of the forests, of which the principal are the collection of licence fees and the prevention of felling or stripping without licence. All these Crown Bailiffs are members of the police, and receive no additional remuneration for their services in connection with forest administration. They can only devote to this such spare time as their other duties afford them, or such opportunities as their journeys on their main business may yield them ; so, though they are as a body zealous officers, they have not much chance of bestowing the attention it deserves on this part of their duty, and no one can blame them for the many undiscovered trespasses and offences that are committed, and for the great loss that it is well known the Treasury suffers therefrom. I respectfully submit that the time has arrived for a reconsideration of this part of the administration. The inspection of Pine Forests especially entails a very heavy work, the bulk of which can only be done on foot. I have therefore no hesitation in saying that the Revenue has been, and still is, defrauded to a great extent. Private letters, as well as the communications from the Crown Bailiffs, go to prove that at the present moment this is the case. It has also come to my knowledge that during the past bark season large areas of Crown land have been denuded of their bark, and the Revenue not benefited to the extent of one shilling. There are several Districts in which Forest Rangers could well be appointed to do nothing else than forest work. If such a course as this were adopted the revenue from licences and the receipts from the sale of seized timber and wattle-bark would be many times larger than they are at present, while numerous existing abuses would be brought to light and rectified.

2. Under the 5th Section of the Waste Lands Act, 1881, the following areas have been made forest reserves, and gazetted as such :—

	<i>Acres.</i>
1. Montagu .....	1000
2. West Coast Pine Reserve .....	8500
3. Mount Bischoff Timber Reserve .....	1700
4. Lisle ditto .....	3000
5. Tasman's Peninsula .....	2500
6. Branxholm Forest Reserve.....	5000
7. Beaconsfield ditto.....	3000
8. Lefroy ditto .....	850
9. Windfalls ditto .....	27,000
	52,550

3. During the year 1888 the income arising from the forests of Tasmania amounted to only £2526 6s. 6d., derived from the following sources:—

	£	s.	d.
Timber-licence Fees .....	591	11	10
Bark-stripping Contracts .....	216	1	11
Sale of seized Timber .....	76	10	3
Domain Contract .....	160	0	0
Royalty on Pine .....	1482	2	6
	<hr/>		
	£2526	6	6
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When it is remembered that this is the entire income derived from the timber and bark growing on millions of acres of what are hill crown lands, the scope that there is for improvement may readily be estimated; its present amount is certainly not creditable to the country.

The reason for the smallness of this branch of the revenue is to be found in the manner in which both the foreign and home consumer of our produce of wood have been treated, and in the laxity of our stewardship over our splendid property. In regard to the former matter, the Agent-General is doing good work in drawing the attention of foreign countries, especially the Italian Government, to the value of our hardwood timber for its suitability as railway sleepers, by having a series of tests made to prove their strength, shrinkage, and durability, under the superintendence of the proprietors, Messrs. Ransome & Co., and samples of timber are about to be sent for further testing, as there is a general impression in England—and Mr. Wright, C.E., of the railway administration, having made enquiries into the matter, has given expression to it—that the shrinkage of stringy bark is too great to admit of its use for railway sleepers.

Tasmanian timber has had this reputation for many years, especially in England, but the reason can well be laid at our own doors. For it will be in the recollection of many of our oldest colonists that some of the ships built 40 years ago were from timber green out of the bush. A tree alive in the bush in the morning was part of the ship in the evening; no attention was paid as to age, quality, or season; the consequences were bad, and, as results proved, short-lived vessels. In comparison with them, take those beautiful vessels built by the late John Watson, John Ross, Messrs. Mackey, Lucas, and others, which would be very hard to eclipse for the quality of timber in their construction; some of them are alive to this day, and in as good condition as they were 20 years ago, and almost indestructible. But every care was taken that the timber used in their construction was free from blemish; only matured trees, of best quality, were chosen; cut in the fall of the year, and well seasoned before being put in the ship. I speak from my own knowledge, as I saw a good deal of the timbers picked for the construction of Mr. Ross's ships as it stood in the forest, and I was a frequent visitor to the neighbouring ship-yards while the construction of vessels was going on there, where I gained a large amount of information from the shipbuilders, who are the best judges.

From all the information I can gather, the requirements of the local market and intercolonial trade are supplied from hand to mouth; no stocks are kept, consequently a large amount of inferior timber must be utilised that is cut at a wrong time of the year, too young, and of very doubtful quality. I saw logs on the wharf lately, sent to the sawmill, the hearts of which were completely rotten, but was told small timber could be cut outside of it fit for building purposes. I should not recommend such timber to be used for that purpose, or to be sent out of the Colony: it only, in my opinion, being fit for firewood.

Until our hardwood timbers are prepared for the foreign market by a proper system of ring-barking at the fall of the year, and keeping stocks of such timber ready cut up to meet any call that may be made for it, Tasmanian timber will labour under a great disadvantage compared with that of other timber-producing countries, where every care is taken that only the best matured trees are selected, and it is treated in such a manner that its quality can be guaranteed. And it will be found a very difficult matter to displace timber from other countries once they get introduced, although they may not be so well adapted for the work required to be done as our timber is.

I desire to bring this matter under the serious consideration of millowners and others who are deeply interested in the timber trade, and I think it will be conceded that if matured trees of best quality were felled in the fall of the year, cut into railway sleepers, or other sized timber suitable for export, and stacked for a few months, they could guarantee it to be sound, of best quality, and with a very small amount of shrinkage. Once get a good outside opinion, and our timber trade would increase to a degree.

When we find so much is being done to draw the attention of the outside markets of the world to the value of our immense timber forests, it is surely not asking too much of those who would be the greatest gainers if such a desirable object could be obtained, as a large export trade for their produce, to assist by placing it in the market in any quantity, true to name, of the best quality, and properly seasoned.

It was my intention to have brought under your notice the desirability of holding stocks of seasoned timber for the construction of railway carriages and sleepers. A private Member of the House of Assembly having brought the matter under the notice of the Government, it will not be necessary for me to enlarge on the subject. I cordially approve of the suggestion, as the result must be eminently satisfactory.

There are no stocks of seasoned timber to be obtained in the Colony at the present time should any demand be made for it, and, as it is very probable all the rolling-stock required for our railways will be constructed in the Colony at an early date, steps should at once be taken to provide for such consummation.

Mr. Cundy, the Locomotive Superintendent of the T.M.L. Railway, very kindly allowed me to inspect a first-class carriage now in course of construction at the Company's works, Hobart, which, he informs me, will cost very much less, carry more passengers, and have better accommodation than one of a similar class built in London.

Having visited some of the Huon Pine forests at Macquarie Harbour,—viz., one at the mouth of the Gordon and two in Kelly's Basin, I was very much impressed with the enormous amount of timber left on the ground to waste. Only the very best logs in a tree are taken; limbs, many of them of large size, and even whole trees that have shown some defect, have been left to cumber the ground just as they fell. Hundreds of thousands of feet of good sound timber have been thus left to waste, because the only customer we have at the present moment,—viz., Victoria,—declines to take pine unless in the log, which must be of the best quality, squared, free from faults, and figured. South Australia, which at one time imported, does not import any at all now, the heavy royalty imposed being the principal reason. This market will be hard to recover, a suitable timber having taken its place, which applies to all the colonies. The royalty having been reduced, a large amount of logs lying in the forest will be set free, which is gradually finding its way into the market.

As it is very desirable all this fallen timber should be cleared up, the forest being almost impassable, I would recommend for the consideration of the Minister that it be utilised for sleepers in the construction of the railway from Strahan to Mount Zeehan, for which it would be valuable at the Strahan end, there being a scarcity of timber for that purpose.

On the banks of the Gordon, near the mouth, large quantities of pine logs, mostly the superior limbs of trees, in places six and seven deep, are to be found, which could be utilised for the same purpose.

At the head of a tramway two miles up Barnes' Creek, at the mouth of the Gordon River, also in the pine forests in Kelly's Basin, blackwood logs ready to be got out are lying as they were felled, the owner not having been allowed to remove them in consequence of the Regulations that came into force at the time.

The pine forests are reproducing themselves to a wonderful degree, from the small seedling to the magnificent sapling fifty feet high and eighteen inches in diameter, promising in the future a better and larger supply of timber than the preceding crop yielded.

There is a large amount of standing timber still available; but, with the large number of logs on hand on the 31st December, 1889—viz., 4485—great care will have to be exercised that this available timber is not destroyed, and at the same time that it does not cripple our foreign trade. The royalty on pine for home consumption having been abolished, and that on export having been reduced to one halfpenny per foot, the pinner can well afford to pay a heavier licence fee.

Drastic measures will have to be provided to meet and counteract the numerous abuses which undoubtedly exist on reserved lands. I would therefore recommend that severe penalties be levied in certain cases, instead of as at present the forfeiture of a few logs, which, after all, are of little value to the Government, and does not cost the offender more than a few shillings—in no way deterring or putting any check on his nefarious proceedings, and chaucing what he may make out of it.

4. I take this opportunity of drawing the attention of the Minister and Parliament to the way in which agricultural land is disposed of under the present Crown Lands Act, the existing system entailing not only a loss to the State by the probable destruction of valuable timber, but holding out the temptation to capitalists and speculators to purchase large selections and hold them over till their value is sensibly increased by being opened up with roads, and very probably a railroad, at the expense of the Colony. If all good class land with heavy beds of valuable timber was opened up by good roads, so as to enable the splitter and sawyer to get the timber off it, and then surveyed into lots of a suitable size for men of small means, and sold at public auction, the revenue would be so much the better for the timber business, and the increased value of the land would more than pay for the road, and the purchaser would at once have a road to bring his produce to market. Every

legitimate means should be taken to prevent the speculator getting possession of these lands, who does a great injury to the Colony by keeping that yeomanry off the soil we are all so anxious to see settled on it.

5. Crown lands with valuable wattle-bark thereon have been sold to selectors, who, after paying one or two instalments and removing the whole of the bark, worth hundreds of pounds, have given up the land. Had a responsible officer inspected such land and reported thereon, the Crown estate would in all probability have been saved a heavy loss.

I am credibly informed that splitters have taken the cream off a selection under exactly the same (to them) auspicious conditions.

6. As a rule our forests reproduce themselves; and so, with care, and taking the timber in rotation crops, will not necessitate any system of tree-planting, which could only be done at enormous expense to the Colony, and from which no benefit could ever be looked forward to. The most, if not all, the land available for such a purpose has been alienated, most notably in the Midland Districts, where large areas of rich land are completely destitute of timber. If a small sum of money was voted by Parliament for the collection of indigenous and other seeds, and to experiment by distributing seedlings, and otherwise assisting the proprietors of these lands in inaugurating a system of tree-planting, I am assured they would co-operate, as it would prove so much to their advantage.

Plantations could be laid out by these gentlemen along railway lines, subdivision and side line fences at a very small cost, which after a few years would become very valuable as shelter for stock, and later on still more so for its timbers; for, by a system of rotation crops, the stock will never be robbed of the shelter afforded to it by the removal of timber that is matured, and the proprietor of the future would look upon tree-planting and conserving as part of the management of his estate, and the revenue derived from timber would be looked forward to with as much interest as the increase of his flock or the clip of his wool.

7. On my return from Macquarie Harbour, I brought a quantity of Huon pine seedlings with me as an experiment for distribution. As soon as it was known I had them a rush was made to obtain one. They were distributed as far as they would go; also some celery-top pine seedlings I had sent down from Russell's Falls River.

The interest taken is so great that I have inquiries for seeds and seedlings from all parts of the Colony, and daily I am receiving letters of inquiry how these things are to be obtained, which goes to prove that tree-planting would be carried out to a large extent if some assistance was afforded.

8. Since my appointment I have addressed to you Special Reports—Of a visit made to Eagle Hawk Neck and the adjacent country; Report of the value of the land and the timber thereon at Russell's Falls River; Report of the state of the Beaconsfield Reserve; Report of the condition of the pine forests at the mouth of the Gordon, and in Kelly's Basin, at Macquarie Harbour, including a short visit to Trial Harbour.

I have the honor to be,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

WILLIAM T. H. BROWN,  
*Conservator of Forests.*

*The Hon. the Minister of Lands.*