

# A powerful century – Information sheet

## Hydro Tasmania: 100 years of achievement

What started in 1914 as the Hydro-Electric Department was later known as the Hydro-Electric Commission, the Hydro-Electric Corporation and Hydro Tasmania. But it has been known and claimed by Tasmanians for generations simply as 'the Hydro'.

For a century, the Hydro has shaped Tasmania's industries, economy, landscape and community. Its **legacy**<sup>1</sup> is not only its engineering and construction **feats**<sup>2</sup>, but also its lasting impact on the State's population and culture.



Cluny Dam

Thousands of 'Hydro people', many from overseas, came to work on the schemes and made Tasmania home. The history of the Hydro is part of the living memory of those workers and their families.

## The beginnings

In the early 1900s, the miracle of hydro-electric power was just arriving in Tasmania. Launceston's streets were lit by the privately owned Duck Reach Power Station, and a few industries were generating their own electric power. In 1914, the Tasmanian Government bought a small electricity company and created the Hydro-Electric Department. The first power station at Waddamana in the Great Lakes was opened in 1916.

By the 1920s, hydro-electric power was **revolutionising**<sup>3</sup> Tasmanian farms, mills, mines and factories, but electricity was not yet widely available for household uses. Constantly growing demand for power kept the pressure on the Hydro's construction program through the 1930s, but equipment, materials, expertise and labour became **scarce**<sup>4</sup> and progress slowed during the Great Depression and the Second World War.

## The pioneers

Construction work in the early years was difficult and dangerous, requiring great **resilience**<sup>5</sup> and **pioneering spirit**<sup>6</sup>. The camps were **rustic**<sup>7</sup> and isolated, and often bitterly cold. Despite the **hardship**<sup>8</sup>, many Hydro men (and later, women) came to remember the time they spent in these 'United Nations' communities with fondness for the friendships they made

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and the social activities they enjoyed. Working conditions improved in the 1930s and 1940s with better housing and village facilities and equipment.

After the Second World War, the Hydro **recruited**<sup>9</sup> many migrants to build dams and power stations. English, Polish, German, Italian, Scandinavian, Eastern European and other migrants came together with Tasmanians, and together they created lively and diverse Hydro communities.



Gordon Dam

## The post-war boom

During the 1950s, huge demand stretched electricity supplies to the limit. Tasmania's industries had boomed, and most ordinary Tasmanians were now enjoying fully electric homes. A severe drought that began in the late 50s saw power restrictions introduced. At the same time, Hydro proposed major new developments with the **construction**<sup>10</sup> and **commissioning**<sup>11</sup> of a number of stations through the 60s. The drought broke in 1968 and a major development was planned for the Gordon River, which would spark Tasmania's greatest environmental conflict.

## Green power

The 70s and 80s saw significant public focus on the Hydro's operations with growing controversy over the flooding of Lake Pedder and plans for the Lower Gordon. Saving the Franklin River became a national political issue, bitterly dividing friends, families and communities, and resulting in more than 1000 arrests. Ultimately, work on the project ended in 1983 when the High Court prevented the dam from being built.

The age of dam building in Tasmania was coming to an end. At its peak, the Hydro employed more than 5200 people. The Anthony Power Development was considered the last in Tasmania. Its power station commissioned in 1994 was named 'Tribute' in honour of the thousands of workers who sacrificed so much to build the State's power system.

## The changed organisation

Out of the days of environmental conflict came a strong commitment by the Hydro to environmental planning and **revegetation**<sup>12</sup>.

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To meet the ever-growing demands for energy, the Hydro explored alternatives to hydro-electricity, such as the oil-powered Bell Bay power station, the Basslink cable connecting Tasmania to Victoria, and the renewable resource of wind power. Since the 1990s, Hydro Tasmania has invested in wind farms on King Island, at Woolnorth in North-West Tasmania and at Musselroe in North-East Tasmania.

In mid-1998, the Hydro-Electric Commission was divided into three government-owned businesses: Hydro Tasmania, Transend and Aurora.

You can find out more about Hydro Tasmania and present day operations at [www.hydro.com.au](http://www.hydro.com.au)



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