

C. SAWMILLING

Adequate statistics for the purpose of this report are not available in a very satisfactory form. The following table gives the number of persons occupied, including employers and owners working on their own account, in the bush sawmilling industry from 1901 to 1936 :—

Table No. 89.—Table showing the Number of Persons (Males and Females) occupied in the Bush, Sawmilling, Forestry, and Related Industries at the various Censuses from 1901 to 1936

Year.		Number.	Year.		Number.
1901	..	8,311	1921	..	9,906
1906	..	8,800	1926	..	10,291
1911	..	9,666	1936	..	10,326
1916	..	8,150			

NOTE.—Figures include those engaged on bush-felling and scrub-cutting.

No figures are available over the whole period to show the number of wage-earners occupied in the sawmilling industry, but in 1926 there were 8,057 so employed ; in 1936 the figure had fallen to 6,765, plus 511 partly or wholly unemployed, making a total of 7,276. The balance is made up principally of those engaged in forestry, bush-clearing, and scrub-cutting, firewood-cutting, &c.

The following figures, taken from Factory Production Statistics, show the number engaged in sawmilling since 1933. The difference in the figures in this table, the details of which are taken from the Factory Production Statistics, from the census figures in the previous table is accounted for, for the most part, by the omission of afforestation, bush-clearing, and firewood-cutting from the census figures. Differences in method of collection also account for some of the variations.

Table No. 90.—Table showing Number of Persons engaged in Sawmilling from 1933 to 1944

Year.		Number.	Year.		Number.
1933-34	..	5,323	1939-40	..	8,487
1934-35	..	6,325	1940-41	..	8,421
1935-36	..	7,207	1941-42	..	8,061
1936-37	..	8,005	1942-43	..	7,574
1937-38	..	8,364	1943-44	..	7,806
1938-39	..	7,917			

These figures include both bush and town sawmilling (the latter includes timber-dressing employees). The increase in persons occupied in this industry until at least 1941 reflect in some measure the increased activity of the building industry, in particular housing construction. The falling off subsequent to that date is probably less than would be expected in view of the large number of operatives who were on war service. Defence construction works, however, were an essential industry and many operatives were retained, and other operatives directed into the industry.

Evidence was adduced to show that, despite the return of the servicemen, the industry was not receiving its proportionate quota of workers. There would appear to be a reluctance to return to the bushfelling and sawmilling industry on the part of many ex-servicemen formerly engaged therein. Some witnesses suggested that immigrants should be brought out to provide operatives. The production of timber is vital to an expansion of the building industry, and unless this occupation can be made more attractive by the provision of adequate housing and several other amenities in the milling areas, there appears to be no solution to the problem of timber shortage. The position is the more serious in that practically all reserve stocks of timber were exhausted during the period of defence construction works, particularly during 1942 and 1943, when a large proportion of those engaged in timber-felling and sawmilling were overseas.