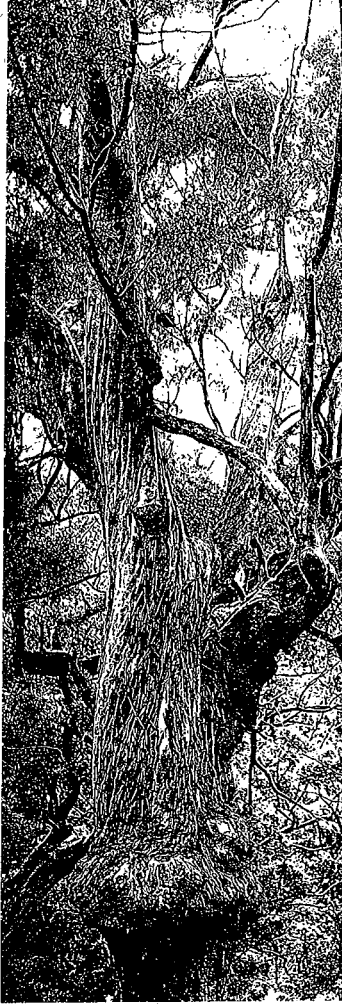


DUPLICATE

FUTURE FOREST MANAGEMENT IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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FUTURE FOREST MANAGEMENT IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

It is relatively easy to be critical of the management of forests in the past, particularly if you can attribute them to the failures of Governments of a political persuasion different to your own. The facts are, however, that across Australia and certainly in Western Australia, this generation of Ministers and bureaucrats have reaped the benefit of essentially good management of our native forests and the foresight that led to our predecessors planting large areas of tree plantations.

That is not to say, however, that there were not ways to improve forest management. It was patently obvious by the mid 1970s that there was need for new approaches, at least to cope with changing community attitudes.

Progress to date

The decade of the 1980s has seen major and I believe demonstrably positive changes in our approach to forest management in Western Australia. There were five significant major initiatives.

Firstly, the development of an integrated management agency. The formation of CALM nearly six years ago, which in part was generated by the idea (which today thanks to the Brundtland Report is almost ubiquitous) that there was a need to integrate environment and economic development. The integration of land management agencies, and the practice of integrated management on the ground, has given the forest managers and the Government tremendous flexibility and efficiency, which has made possible the changes which were necessary in both forest land-use planning and management.

Secondly, one of CALM's earliest tasks was to review the outdated and inequitable log pricing system. The new system of log pricing has not only placed the Government, the Department and the industry in a strong position to defend the use of forests for timber production, but also has been one of the major forces driving the dramatic improvements in forest utilisation.

Thirdly, in 1987 the Government launched Forest Management Plans and a Timber Strategy. This was the first time there had been extensive public participation in forest land use planning and management. Even our staunchest critics in those days concede that the Plans and the Strategy have been a major success. They achieved many things, but most of all they struck a balance in uses of the forest.

Fourthly, the Government agreed to the integration of all logging activities in the forest under CALM's control.

Finally, there has been major expansion into new ways to establish new forests on farmlands.

Collectively, these initiatives have resulted in a revolution in forest management practices which have benefited all forest users. There have been massive increases in the conservation estate and improvements in the management of that estate both for wildlife and people. At the same time, there has been large investments - some \$200 million worth - in the forest industries. There have been dramatic improvements in utilisation, both in the forest and in the sawmills. For example, there has been approximately a 40 per cent reduction in the area of forests cutover each year, yet the quantity of sawlogs has been maintained. The investments in the forest industries, in addition to improving the efficiency of use of the logs, have also led to dramatic increases in the proportion of timber used for high-value product.

The next step

Having listed these initiatives and demonstrated the achievements that have been made, you may wonder why the title of this paper implies changes. Why should we change the Forest Management Plans and Timber Strategy if they have been so successful? The Government doesn't intend to change these two pillars, which

have provided the foundations for the success of forest management in Western Australia. But the very success of these initiatives has now put us in the position where we can take another substantial leap forward in improving forest management.

This is an important theme that I think should be repeated constantly throughout Australia by all those concerned with improving the current hopeless confrontational debate about Australia's forests. The Western Australian example illustrates that if you take an initiative and break the log jam, as was done in WA by providing security to both the conservation estate and the timber resource, then not long down the track there are increased opportunities to reconcile many of the unresolved conflicts between different forest uses.

Consequently, the Department of CALM has commenced a review of existing forest management practices. In part, the review is designed to pick up specific statutory requirements which resulted from the approval of the Environmental Review and Management Program for the WA Chip & Pulp Co Pty Ltd woodchip project. A condition of the approval of that ERMP was that CALM undertake a review of the existing road, river and stream system and present for public comment an Environmental Management Program for its silvicultural operations in the jarrah/marri forest.

Also, at the time of the production of the Timber Strategy, CALM foreshadowed that it would undertake a comprehensive inventory of the jarrah forest, and incorporate the results of that inventory into future wood supply predictions. That inventory is now nearing completion and will constitute part of the review.

You will also be aware that CALM is working cooperatively with the Australia Heritage Commission with the aim of developing a rational approach to listing of forest areas in the National Estate. Many of the data that are being collated in this exercise will obviously be relevant to the broader review.

But in addition to meeting these statutory and administrative requirements, there is an opportunity to build on the foundations of the Forest Management Plans and the Timber Strategy. The success of that Strategy and the technology that has been developed has placed the Department in a position where it can make a major advance towards complete integration of forest management practices, at the level of the cutting coupe, in a way which will enhance all forest values.

Time is too short for me to elaborate on the numerous technologies and administrative advances that have been developed in a relatively short time. But I illustrate with three examples.

The dramatic improvement in utilisation of logs in the southern karri/marri forests, combined with success of the thinning and prescribed burning of young karri stands, has a profound effect on fire management strategies. In the past it was essential to provide for large fuel reduced buffers around young regenerated highly inflammable karri stands, which as a consequence resulted in the need for relatively large clearfelled areas and their concentration. It is now becoming possible both to reduce the size of the cutting coupes and disperse them. This then provides the opportunity to minimise the effect of clearfelling on other forest values, such as conservation and aesthetics.

The decision to provide for integrated logging in our forests also provides a major opportunity to improve virtually all aspects of forest management. In the past it was possible for five logging contractors working for five different sawmills to visit successively the one cutting coupe to derive the product a particular sawmill desired. The logging crews were then followed by CALM staff who undertook the post logging silvicultural treatment. The previous system was not only inefficient but deleterious to the forest environment. The new system is much more efficient, thereby generating funds to improve forest values, and it is also much kinder on the forests. The process of logging in the forest can be used then to drive forest management practices needed to ensure its conservation for all values.

For example, it is well-known that a reduction of *Banksia* understorey in the jarrah forest is a necessary prerequisite to improving its resistance to *Phytophthora cinnamomi*, the cause of jarrah dieback. CALM can, and does, reduce *Banksia grandis* density in a separate herbicide operation, but the cost can be \$200 per hectare. Not surprisingly, not many hectares are treated. Virtually the same operation could be completed as part of the integrated logging operation using logging equipment at a cost estimated at \$20 per hectare. The reduction of the density of the *Banksia grandis* understorey is probably the most important conservation initiative that could be taken in the jarrah forest.

One of the most difficult silvicultural operations for the community to accept is the practice of uncommercial thinning of forests. It might be true that we need to kill small trees to make the forest grow better - duplicating the natural process. But any marketing expert will tell you that this story is a disaster. The development of new technologies like Valwood, which can use these very same trees to produce high quality furniture, not only solves the marketing problem but results in the production of a highly desirable product. In the next several weeks, we expect the first trial sale of Valwood products to be on its way to Europe and this week the Premier is launching an exhibition of fine furniture including Valwood products, which will be exhibited at the International Furniture Fair in Milan next month.

Integrated forest management

There is no doubt that there is a need to reserve representative parts of forest ecosystems in national parks or other nature conservation reserves which are not subject to logging. This has been done in Western Australia. But there is also the need to use the remainder of the forest for timber production. The challenge is to ensure that in that area of forest which is used for timber production, all other forest values are protected as well.

The concept of multi-use of forests, I believe, is one of forest managements' most important assets. In simple terms for the ordinary member of the community, successful multiple-use forest management equates to having your cake and eating it too. Multiple-use management has obviously been practised in our native forests in the past. While many, particularly those involved in the profession, would judge it to have been successful, it is patently obvious that the rest of the community requires a much higher level of sophistication.

We can tell the general community *ad nauseam* that forests regrow after they are cut and that timber production in native forests threatens no animal or plant species. We are right but these rational arguments have no weight with the ordinary Joe when he sees in the bush or on a television screen piles of wasted logs and debris with his vision uninterrupted by a standing live tree.

Multiple-use management does mean sub-optimal use of any single use. Quite obviously, if we were only interested in timber production we would rotate our forests in less than forty years. Regrettably, I have noted recently that some members of the profession and the industry have advocated the concentration of forest production in native forest in single-use areas. What advocates of this approach do not realise is that the next step after the designation of forest production to single use areas of forest would be the exclusion of timber production from native forest.

Rather than retreat to a corner of the forest, which apart from being politically naive is something we do not have the financial resources to do, our strategy in Western Australia is to progressively upgrade our management so that that sum of all forest values is increased and that all forest uses are catered for.

The new technologies that have flowed from the Forest Management Plans and the Timber Strategy, and the total integration of management on the ground, have now positioned us to do this. These new advances will be incorporated into the improvements in forest management which I am confident will flow from the review.

Integration of trees into farms

Another major initiative in Western Australia - the integration of tree plantations onto farms - has its foundations in much of the philosophy that underpins our approach to native forest management. I am conscious that our advocacy of an expansion of tree plantations onto farms has not drawn plaudits from elements of either the green or the brown sides in the forest debate.

But the facts are, even in Western Australia where trees grow rapidly, we would not be able to produce sufficient wood of the type that would replace the native forest resource, even if technical problems could be overcome, inside thirty years: We also would not be able to plant trees on many farms if we were constrained to non commercial native species.

But there is the opportunity to create new forests, while at the same time preserving or increasing agricultural income, providing new income to the farmer and reducing land and water degradation which has resulted from the removal of native vegetation.

The key elements of the Western Australian approach to creating a new forest on cleared agricultural land are:

- Integration of agriculture and forestry. This means locating trees in areas on the farm that are more suitable for tree growth than agriculture production, as part of a total farm plan.
- Developing and applying new technologies, such as tree growth prediction models and silvicultural regimes that are compatible with agriculture.
- Ensuring genuine farmer participation and ownership and a commercial return to the farmer which is structured to meet his cashflow requirement.

In Western Australia, over 9,000 hectares of tree plantations have been established on farms. There are no technical or social barriers to increasing this estate ten times. The only impediment to creating a new forest to complement an existing forest is the Australian investment culture, and those tax and institutional constraints which cause investment to be directed to short term speculation ventures rather than long term wealth creating ones.

The community may disagree about the role of native forests in producing timber products three decades hence. There can be no doubt, however, that the future expansion of the forest industries is going to depend on our ability to integrate forestry into farming practice.

Conclusion

In relatively few years, we have made substantial improvements, both in the actual practice of forestry and in the public perception of forestry in Western Australia by integrating environmental and economic objectives. An important ingredient of that success is the security provided by the Government both to those interested in conservation and those interested in production. That stability will continue, but it does not imply that we will not seek constantly to improve our performance by changing practices. In fact, I believe paradoxically that stability only comes from the preparedness to review and change to new methods which improve our performance.

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