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# CALM BRIEFING PAPER 1/90

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## TREE FELLING IN THE SHANNON RIVER NATIONAL PARK

There have been a number of comments in the media recently about an incident in which trees were inadvertently felled in the Shannon River National Park. This briefing note explains the circumstances leading up to this incident, and indicates the action taken to prevent reoccurrence.

### THE BOUNDARY OF THE SHANNON NATIONAL PARK

The boundaries of most national parks are well-defined, surveyed lines, for example high water marks, roads or other easily recognisable physical features. An exception is the Shannon National Park, the boundary of which is the watershed of the Shannon River. This boundary is not marked on the ground, but only occurs as a contour line on departmental maps. This contour line occurs in heavy forest with a tall dense understorey.

When the park management plan was being developed, a proposal to demarcate the watershed on the ground was put forward. The estimate for this task amounted to \$2 million. It was decided that this money would be better spent on other developments within the park.

### PREPARATION OF FIRE BOUNDARIES IN THE SOUTHERN FOREST REGION

The tall forests of the Southern Forest Region offer special difficulties for firefighters. These include hopovers generated from dead wood alight in the crowns of very tall trees, trees burning down across roads, or burning limbs falling from dead trees in high winds onto men working below. We have suffered one fatality in recent years and a number of serious near misses, including a tree burning down and falling across a gang truck.

In order to minimise these problems a program of stag removal along burn and fire boundaries was instituted some years ago. In this operation, dead trees, hollow-butted trees or trees with dead crowns adjoining fire boundaries are marked by a CALM officer. Subsequently, logging contractors are employed to fall the trees and harvest any merchantable logs from them.

This operation only occurs in State forest. It does not occur in national parks, nature reserves or areas scheduled to be converted to reserves or parks in the regional plans. In these areas, alternative (but less satisfactory) methods are used, for example raking around tingle trees on the boundary of Walpole-Nornalup National Park.

An operation to thin out hazardous trees took place along the edge of Strachans Road near the northern boundary of the Shannon National Park last summer.

## **AN ERROR WAS MADE**

The watershed of the Shannon River, and therefore the boundary of the Shannon National Park loops across Strachans Road in one place. The CALM officer in charge of this operation was aware of this, but in making his demarcation on the ground he made an error. The boundary between State forest and national park was marked incorrectly by some five hundred metres or so. As a result, an area of several hectares within the park was mistakenly considered to be within State forest. Dead and stag-headed trees were marked within this area, the trees were subsequently felled and the logs removed.

No "logging operation" was authorised within the Shannon Park. This incident occurred entirely as a result of an honest error by a CALM officer, and is regretted by everybody.

## **COMPLICATING FACTORS**

Firstly, the boundary of the park in this area is hard to pick. The area is low-lying and the watersheds of the Shannon River and the Deep River are almost linked by a number of streams and depressions.

Secondly, the area concerned was previously selectively logged many years ago, before the Shannon became a national park. As a result, there are many stumps in the area remaining from the previous operation.

Thirdly, the logging contractor who carried out the job had temporarily mislaid his branding hammer. Consequently, the stumps from the trees which he felled were not branded. However, all logs generated were chalk-marked, permission for this having been given by CALM.

Finally, the eastern side of Strachans Road is a Disease Risk Area (quarantine). However, the operations were correctly carried out under permit and in dry soil conditions, using appropriate hygiene measures.

## **DISPOSAL OF THE LOGS**

The logs generated from this general area were disposed of as follows:

- ❖ First and second grade jarrah sawlogs to Franey and Thompson's Mill at Albany.
- ❖ First and second grade karri sawlogs to Whittakers Mill at Denmark.
- ❖ Chiplogs to the Diamond Mill.

Since at the time it was not known that some of the logs had come from within the national park, no separate accounting of these logs took place.

Parts of some of the trees felled were not sound enough to be converted into sawlogs or chiplogs. These sections have been heaped and burnt as part of standard post logging rehabilitation.

## **RESTORATION OF THE AREA WITHIN THE NATIONAL PARK**

The operation which has taken place amounts only to a light thinning. There is no long-term visual impact on the forest.

Minor soil disturbance caused by log snagging and loading will be rehabilitated next summer.

The area east of Strachans Road is scheduled to be burnt next summer for fuel reduction adjacent to the national park. Understorey vegetation will regenerate following the burn. The area west of Strachans Road has been designated for fuel reduction burning in the Shannon D'Entrecasteaux Management Plan. It is not scheduled to be burned imminently but experience in this part of the world has shown that vigorous regrowth of ground vegetation will still come away on disturbed sites.

## ACTION TAKEN TO PREVENT REOCCURRENCE

All staff in the Southern Forest Region have been briefed on this incident. The need for extreme care in delineating park boundaries has been emphasised.

The General Manager has interviewed the staff concerned, who are now doubly aware of the need for tight control of all operations in State forest adjoining national parks.

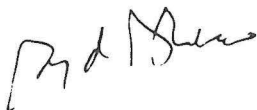
Regional managers for the three forest regions have been instructed to upgrade training programs for staff involved in survey work and to improve control systems applying to fire boundary preparation.

The need to survey and demarcate the boundary of the Shannon watershed is being reconsidered.

## CONCLUSION

This was an unfortunate and regrettable incident. All CALM staff are proud of our national parks and under no circumstances would they carry out unnecessary tree felling within them. At the same time, it is most important that we minimise the hazards to staff involved in firefighting and other fire management work in the heavy forest country.

I have asked field managers to confer with all personnel as to how we can best minimise the risks to firefighters, but still preserve important forest values. All suggestions will be welcome.



Syd Shea  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

6 June 1990

PS This incident was reported to me via the Minister's office. When it was referred to the district office for investigation the immediate reaction was disbelief. The error was only discovered after a detailed check had been carried out in the field.

Thus I can only conclude that the people who reported the incident to the Minister were following our operations very carefully. Subsequently, television crews were led to the scene by these people.

All staff should be aware that all of our operations are under close scrutiny.