

Choppers cut costs

THE use of helicopters in CALM's prescribed burning program is now fully operational after several years of testing and costing different systems.

Several helicopter burns are planned for Dwellingup and Jarrahdale forests.

One recent successful burn at Dwellingup was designed to remove flammable material following logging operations when leaf litter had built up to 20 tonnes a hectare.

Such heavy fuels on the ground makes it dangerous and difficult for people to walk through and light at prescribed distances as they go.

Matt Reynolds, who was the fire controller for this operation, explained that it was necessary to burn under mild weather conditions, when the remaining jarrah trees were much less likely to become damaged by a too-intense fire.

"The conditions we were looking for included a lead-up period of fine weather,

by Tammie Reid

with low winds on the day," Matt said.

"The dry weather experienced during this year's late winter months provided one of the best seasons to get this combination of factors.

He said it was decided that the helicopter be used to light up this particular burn because:

- ◆ each of the burn jobs covered large areas of 1000 to 1600 hectares.
- ◆ the easy manoeuvring of the helicopter provided the flexibility to design different lighting patterns needed to ensure an effective and safe burn.
- ◆ it was a safer and quicker option than using people to physically light the area; the area covered by the helicopter in one day equates with the use of 60 ground crews carrying out the same task.
- ◆ cost-wise it was more economical than using the fixed-wing plane as the

helicopter was in the area completing other operations for CALM's burning programs. The ferry time was minimal, travelling from one job in Harvey to another in Dwellingup and then on to Jarrahdale the next day.

Matt said the system involved a jelly-petrol mix in a sophisticated dispenser called a helitorch, suspended under the helicopter.

"A gas flame system ignites the jelly drip as it's released," Matt said.

"This is electronically controlled by the navigator to allow different lighting intensities.

"For example, on a cooler day there might be a need to light in a more intense pattern to get the same coverage and flame height."

The helitorch has been used this winter to burn approximately 5000 hectares of logging debris and pine needle beds.

CALM plans to use the helitorch in other forests south of Perth for spring and autumn burning programs.



A helitorch suspended below the helicopter used in the prescribed burning program. Photo by Tammie Reid



Nov. 94

Job No. 228/1



18 GOLD 100-3 22A
 19 KODAK 100-3 23
 20 GOLD 100-3 24A
 21 KODAK 100-3



15 GOLD 100-3 18A
 16 GOLD 100-3 19A
 17 KODAK 100-3 21A



11 GOLD 100-3 14A
 12 KODAK FILM 16A
 13 KODAK 100-3 17A



8 GOLD 100-3 12A
 9 KODAK 100-3 13A



2 GOLD 100-3 7A
 3 KODAK 100-3 8A
 4 GOLD 100-3 9A
 5 KODAK 100-3

