

The Growing Importance of Pine

On world averages, about 80 per cent of a country's timber requirements are softwoods, however, in Western Australia the position is reversed, and about 94 per cent of consumption is hardwood.

The continent of Australia has no natural forests of pine. A few timbers such as hoop pine, bunya pine and cypress pine are not true pines and are not now of high importance in the economic field of providing large quantities of softwood needed by Australia.

Western Australia has no native commercial softwoods, and people have therefore learnt to use eucalypt hardwood for many purposes for which softwood is used in other parts of the world.

In 1963, the Forestry and Timber Bureau of the Department of National Development extracted figures to show the anticipated log volume needed by Australia in the year 2000 to provide the country's annual requirements of sawnwood, plywood, paper, other wood pulp and wood chip products, piles, poles and posts. The figure is estimated at between 960 million and 1,150 million cubic feet.

If the national forestry programmes of that period (1963) were continued but not expanded, the expected annual yield of logs in the year 2000 would be 629 million cubic feet. The annual cost (also 1963 figures) of purchasing imports to bridge the gap between local production and demand would be between \$422 million and \$664 million, assuming adequate availability of material from overseas.

In fact the C.I.F. values of imports of forest products into Australia in the financial years 1966-67 and 1967-68 were \$192 million and \$209 million respectively.

Western Australia faces a similar problem. If we assume that total log requirements per capita will be 45 to 50 cubic feet, then with an envisaged population approaching two million in the year 2000, the State will need in that year 90 million to 100 million cubic feet of log



Radiata pine plantation, Grimwade, planted in 1933

timber . . . double our current requirements.

At present about 12 per cent of the annual log supply comes from private property. By the year 2,000, however, supplies from this source will be negligible.

This leaves State Forest to provide the total requirements and it is estimated that on present standards of utilization, the annual cut of native timber, under sustained yield, will be little more than 40 million cubic feet, at least until second growth native timber becomes available. When this occurs increased annual production can be expected, but although log quality will improve, average log size will be reduced as the veterans of the forest, hundreds of years old, are removed.

It is evident, therefore, that there is an urgent need to increase timber production to cope with likely future demands.

Pines have been chosen to provide for this increase, mainly because in plantation form they have a higher rate of growth of marketable wood than native hardwoods on equivalent sites, and because softwood timber has a much wider industrial use than hardwood timber.

The Federal Government, following representations by the Australian Forestry Council, recognised the need for an expanded rate of pine planting, and to achieve this, in 1967 set aside \$20 million of loan money over the next five years for an Australia-wide programme aimed at doubling the rate of planting, thereby bringing it to 75,000 acres per annum.

The loans will be free of interest and repayment of capital for the first 10 years because of the long-term nature of forestry and the long period between planting and income-earning production.

The limitation on the rate at which pine plantations can be established is chiefly financial and the Federal Government grant has enabled this rate to be doubled.

At the beginning of 1970 Forests Department of Western Australia pine plantations totalled 65,417 acres—the 1969 planting season provided 6,881 acres of that figure (excluding experimental plots).

With the higher planting rate it now appears that the target of 240,000 acres of pine plantation in Western Australia by the year 2000 will be achieved. Even so, this will lift production only by an estimated 30 million cubic feet per annum at that time and further plantings are likely to be needed.

In short, travellers in all states of Australia can look forward to seeing a lot more "white" wood in years to come.



*Part of the Nannup radiata pine plantation, seen from Milward fire lookout tower.
Foreground pines planted in 1959*