

LAND USE IN THE FOREST ZONE

by A.E. Rice

There seems to be a long-standing grievance against the Forests Department, on the part of some country Shire Councils and other rural organisations. They claim that we are selfishly withholding from selection, land which would otherwise be made fully productive in the hands of local farmers. In this regard, it is illuminating to examine the extent of utilisation on land already alienated for farming.

With the increasing coverage of our A P I plans, certain areas have been selected over the past 5 years for a study of the relationship between developed and un- (or under-) developed private property. First, all alienated land is picked out on the plans, then all A P I types indicating development such as cleared pasture, crops, ringbarking etc., are extracted, and the remaining undeveloped country can be expressed as a percentage of the total of alienated land.

So far the following Projects have been examined:

Locality	Date of photos.	Alienated land			Percent un-developed
		Devel.	Undevel.	Total	
30 mile radius from Bunbury	1951-8	454000	173000	627000	28%
Denmark District	1957	13000	50000	63000	79%
Upper Blackwood Electorate	1951-9	377000	406000	783000	52%
Busselton-Augusta District	1955	82000	200000	282000	71%
Preston Valley District	1959	37000	52000	89000	58%

The Bunbury Project would not be representative of the agricultural areas as a whole, being located in the area of intensive development surrounding a regional capital; nor would it be fair to include the Denmark District due to its relative isolation from large distributing centres. Omitting these two Projects, the remaining three could be taken as a fairly representative sample of rural development, at least in the lower Southwest.

The period of time that has elapsed since the aerial photographs were taken must be considered, and the figures quoted refer back in some cases, to a state of development existing up to 13 years ago. Local officers will be in the best position to know if these figures still reflect a true state of affairs, or whether a boom in agricultural development has made them out-of-date.

From the above figures, it does not seem unreasonable to assume that approximately 50% of all alienated land in the Forest Zone is lacking

in development. This figure leaves a margin to account for further clearing since the photos were taken, and also the higher rate of development in the vicinity of the metropolitan area. Independent confirmation of this figure was given by the Commonwealth Bureau of Statistics in some 1961/62 figures supplied for the Shire of Manjimup. According to these, the total area of alienated land in the Shire is 249,000 acres, and the undeveloped area is 125,000 acres, i.e. approx. 51% of the total.

The preliminary Forest Inventory quotes the total area of alienated land in the Forest Zone as being over 9 million acres in 1960. 50% of this total represents 4.5 million acres of private property which is lacking in development, or an area roughly equivalent to the present area of dedicated State Forest. This is a terrific slice of country that is neither being used for agricultural purposes nor for regulated timber production, with the exception of a tenth part of the area on which timber is reserved to the Crown.

Before embarking on costly development projects in the Kimberleys and far North, it might be worth our while to first consider this great area of unproven potential lying right in our own backyards.

