

Rotational Burning in the Karri Forest -
Why Not ?

Mr. Peet (Vol. 2, No. 1) perceived that the initial burn is the key to introduction of cyclic burning in the Karri forest. He recognised that here is a practical problem to be solved in a practical way by applying additional burning teams from the north.

Is the problem really as simple as that? Mr. Peet would agree with those who say not. The initial burning of some 300,000 acres carrying up to 30 tons of fuel per acre can never be simple. Add extreme variation in forest type, height, condition and composition, also limited access and, in many years, a limited burning period and the problem looms larger and calls for the big thinking indicated by Mr. Peet.

Pre-requisite to any effective burning programme in Karri forest are better access and separation of forest types. Type separation is essential in view of the different techniques and weather conditions required for successful burning of Jarrah, Karri and non forest types. Much of the Karri forest roading programme in recent years has been directed at type separation.

On this basis, current policy entails protection of Karri forest, in units of approximately 1,000 acres, by cyclic burning of surrounding and intervening Jarrah and Marri types and of non-timbered flats (i.e. the more readily burnable and controllable types). Limited burning is required in Karri types to ensure continuity of protection strips.

Cyclic burning of the entire forest is an objective to aim at. It will come. Some years ago the writer suggested a different approach to the initial burn.

Approximately one year in five no "severe" or "dangerous" day occurs in the Karri forest. These mild summers cannot be forecast; however, it is possible to recognise an incipient build up to severe conditions.

Already we have 'extensions' to permit regeneration burning until the end of January. It should be possible, subject to adequate safeguards, to burn into the summer by progressive extensions. Safeguards would include -

- (a) Restriction of burning to areas bounded by recent protection burns.
- (b) Restriction of burning to "Low", "Moderate" and "Average Summer" forecasted fire hazards.

- (c) Burning to cease and mop up and patrol to intensify when a falling barometer warns of a hazard build up.

Can the heavy fuel accumulation in the Karri forest be reduced and maintained at a safe level without acceptance of some degree of summer burning?

There are thinking farmers who recognise the problem and would agree with this approach and would be prepared to see the Forests Department burning in the forest for hazard reduction and community protection when all other burning in the district was prohibited.

The key is effective planning and adequate safeguards.

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