A REPORT ON BORONIA

(Summary of J.A. Thompson's Boronia Report, and notes by other Officers in the Southern Divisions).

Growth Habits Boronia megastigma

The plant germinates from seed in its natural habitat following scrub removal by fire. Boronia appears to germinate profusely under ideal conditions and forms a thick carpet of plants. These plants thin out as they get larger and other scrub becomes established and overtops the Boronia which gradually becomes choked out of the plant community. The cycle is repeated again following the next fire. Although the length of the cycle certainly varies on different sites carrying different scrub types, there is no doubt that Boronia megastigma is an initial coloniser of burnt swamp types over the majority of its range.

The plant flowers at an early stage 1 - 2 years following germination and by 3 - 4 years blossom is plentiful and seed readily available. The plants recover remarkably well from new shoots following the picking of branches for sprays, blossom or seed.

The plant is not hard to cultivate and can be grown quite readily from either seeds or cuttings. A commercial trial area of 10 acres at Collie is now being completely planted up with cuttings and seedlings.

Trade in Boronia (megastigma only)

Boronia megastigma is the native wildflower most sought after for commercial exploitation in the South West. It is used for blossom distillation, ornamental sprays and seed for sale purposes. This exploitation has quite a long history and is likely to continue. The quantities involved are in the order of

Blossom 5,000 lb. (approximately 1/3 Crown Land)
Sprays 11,000 lb. (approximately 1/10th Crown Land)
Seed 50 lb. (unknown Crown Land)

With quantities of the above order it is obviously not economic at any reasonable royalty rates to do any more than carry out the Forests Department responsibilities under the Native Flora Protection Act.

There are indications that picking has been carried out illegally on many reserves in the past and our present control is inadequate.

Suggested Control of Commercial Boronia Picking

1. Control of all Boronia megastigma produce on Crown Land should be by a Forest Produce License issued locally.

The following points should be considered:

1.1. The license issued over a specific area for a specific produce for a definite period, e.g. sprays, blossom or seed.

1.2. The area of the license to be limited e.g. one mile radius from a point on a plan.

1.3. Simultaneous operations should not be permitted.

1.4. A suitable deposit should be held and a suitable royalty rate fixed for each produce.

1.5. An accompanying return to be lodged for each license.

1.6. Initially more than one license can be held but this to be at the discretion of the O.I.C.

2. Permit Boronia picking on all Crown Lands except Flora and Fauna Reserves and National Parks, these to be closed to all commercial operations.

3. Set aside areas for Forests Department observations for both Boronia megastigma and Boronia heterophylla.

4. An arrangement is desirable for the W.A.G.R. to advise Forests Department of railway consignments, particularly of Boronia spray blossom for floral decorations which, as shown above, have grown to considerable proportions.

The proposals above are based on the following two points:

a. Regardless of what royalty and demand increases that take place in the future, it is highly unlikely that returns will equal administration costs.

b. In spite of the economics of the operations, the Forests Department should fully carry out its commitments as the administering authority of the Native Flora Protection Act.

Further Study of Boronia

Consideration should be given to the following aspects of Boronia:

i. The effects of spring and autumn burns on germination.

ii. The effective flowering life.

iii. Effective seed producing period.

iv. Longevity.

v. Investigation into the growth habits of Boronia heterophylla.

CONCLUSION

Present evidence is that no long-term damage result from fires, in fact burning appears to be advantageous to both seed germination and establishment in the absence of competition. A rotational burning system, with an autumn burn every 6 or 7 years to control the scrub competition appears most advantageous to Boronia survival and production.

Boronia regenerates well after stripping provided it is not uprooted, there is no evidence to show that picking threatens survival. However, any consideration of a rotational picking programme must be secondary to a consideration of a burning programme.

Boronia is a valuable asset and is well worth propagating. Some commercial companies are already trying to establish Boronia under cultivated conditions, and further consideration of this aspect is warranted if future demands are to be met.