

## BILLY FIRE PATROLS IN COLLIE PLANTATIONS

by J.S. Evans

Patrols of the waters edge around Pinus radiata plantations adjacent to the Wellington Dam were instituted in the late spring of 1968, following increased usage of the above areas by members of the public on marron party excursions.

Because most people prefer to cook their marron as soon as they have finished catching them the risk of billy fires spreading to nearby plantations is high.

Plantations involved were Mungalup (638 acres, with 3 miles of pines bordering the water) and Bussell's Brook (2412 acres, with 7 miles of shoreline).

Efforts have been made in the past to provide fireplaces in suitable cleared areas for public use and signs have been erected indicating their position and requesting co-operation in the use of fires.

Patrols last fire season were carried out as weather conditions dictated, in two different ways.

1. Patrols by officers in the evenings travelling in pairs looking for and checking fires lit in such positions that they could have been a threat to nearby plantations.

Tactful approaches were made to the public in some circumstances informing them of the danger of fires in these areas and their correct use.

2. Patrols by wages staff on weekends, during the early mornings when the hazard was expected to be high the same day.

During weekdays when weather conditions were extreme a routine check of the water line was made by the gang normally assigned to that plantation.

As an indication of the number of fires found adjacent to Bussell's Plantation for the past two years, in the 1968-69 fire season 53 fires were found of which 24 were potentially dangerous and in the 1969-70 fire season 55 fires were found of which 22 were dangerous.

A most indispensable item used by this patrol was an ordinary plastic bucket with which water from the well was used to douse the fires.

Official instructions have now been received from the Fire Control Superintendent advising officers as to the means of approach, dress to be worn and transport etc.

A handout pamphlet has been prepared for issue to the public when necessary:--

"Camp Fires and Cooking Fires"

To comply with the Bush Fires Act and Forests Act, fires should not be lit above the high water mark of the dam and must be at least 10' from the nearest inflammable material. They must not be left unattended and must be extinguished before being left.

Fires may not be lit when the forecast is dangerous nor during a Bush Fire Emergency ban.

The policy adopted is to accept the tourist and local fisherman and to educate them in the safe use of fires rather than attempt a complete ban which would be unsuccessful and antagonise the public.

It is hoped that the morning patrols can be gradually reduced as public education improves.