

State Forests Works and Services Bill 1980

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

The Bill seeks Parliamentary sanction for expenditure of funds allotted to the Forests Commission from the Works and Services Account for the 1980-81 financial year.

It should be noted that this Bill when approved will authorize expenditure for approximately a calendar year whereas the cash allocations relate to financial years, hence this Bill will operate over parts of two financial years.

The 1980 Act, when it comes into operation, will automatically cancel any unexhausted provision in the 1979 Act.

The items in the Bill are explained in detail in the following pages. In addition, an explanatory statement setting out for each item, actual expenditure during the 1979-80 financial year, proposed expenditure in 1980-81, and the proposed provision in the Bill, accompanies this Memorandum.

ITEM 1—FIRE PROTECTION

The Forests Commission is responsible for prevention and suppression of fires in State Forests, National Parks and Protected Public Land, and its authority in respect of fire prevention extends to much of the land within 1.5 km of the boundaries of these areas.

This territorial responsibility covers almost one-third of the total area of the State of Victoria, the forests of which are recognized as being among the most fire hazardous in the world. The Commission must maintain an effective fire-fighting organization to meet its obligations and this is based on a well-trained force of fire fighters, a system of fire lookouts to provide rapid detection, quick access for men and machinery via a network of roads and tracks, and a reliable communication system.

Aircraft, both fixed and rotary-wing are used for additional fire detection and reconnaissance, fire bombing with retardants, transport of men and equipment in remote areas, back-burning by aerial ignition, and for other special purposes.

The Commission's fire-fighting strategy is based on pre-season prevention works coupled with prompt initial attack. This year provision has been made for the construction of 60 km of new firebreaks, 297 km of fire lines and access tracks, 24 new dams and water storage tanks, fuel reduction in forest areas as seasonal conditions permit and the construction of 36 new helipads.

In addition to forest roads and tracks maintenance will be carried out on 1682 km of firebreaks, 1317 dams, weirs and tanks, 89 fire towers and 221 helipads.

Firefighting equipment will be augmented by the purchase or construction of 3 mobile retardant mixers, 3 first attack dozer loading ramps, 2 kitchen trailer units and the updating of 20 fire pumps, while 6 fire tankers will be replaced by new units.

The Commission's radio network will be further improved by the resiting of six remote VHF radio base stations, at Yarram, Benalla, Corryong, Alexandra, Maffra and Mansfield districts, the construction of new ones in Geelong and Heyfield districts, upgrading of others, and the purchase of a number of additional portable and mobile radio sets.

One of the Western Division's emergency communications balloons will be replaced.

The Commission's summer workforce will again be augmented by mobile, self-contained fire-fighting crews and the employment of additional seasonal labour in country areas. Similar crews have proved most valuable during previous fire seasons, special emphasis being given to their selection and training.

Research will continue into aspects of fire behaviour, and in particular be directed towards improving guidelines for the conduct of fuel reduction operations in both native forest and softwood plantations. Existing studies of the effects of fire on vegetation will be maintained and extended where possible. Further investigation of the suitability of infra-red systems for detecting fire edges through smoke is planned.

ITEM 2—INDIGENOUS STATE FORESTS

This item provides for the regeneration and improvement of native forests.

Regeneration will be established on recently harvested areas by seeding or planting seedlings of native species, and previously forested unproductive bracken and scrub-covered areas will be reforested by planting.

Seed will be sown by hand or air to establish new forest crops on some 4300 ha of productive mountain forests logged prior to Autumn 1981.

More than 5.5 tonnes of eucalypt seed of a number of species required for regeneration programmes will be collected. Where such species produce above average seed crops additional seed will be collected and stored for future use in regenerating forests after harvest or where wild fires destroy productive forests carrying a poor seed crop. Facilities and techniques for extracting, storing and applying seed will be further developed.

Plantings in the mountain ash seed orchard near Broadford will be extended to ensure adequate supplies of high-quality ash seed for future regeneration on reforestation programmes in mountain forests.

Unproductive cull trees providing competition to established regeneration will be removed and overstocked regrowth stands will be thinned to improve growth in mountain, mixed species, box-ironbark, and river red gum forests.

Wherever possible utilization operations by licensees and departmental employees will be managed to ensure the regeneration and improvement of native forests.

Facilities provided in forests for visitors will be improved. Additional measures will be taken to better accommodate those who camp, walk, drive and picnic in forests.

Additional staff will be allocated to attend visitors using forests, and more information will be made available through signs and interpretative displays.

Works and services for recreation will be concentrated in reserves set aside for the purpose but facilities such as fireplaces and sanitary conveniences will be provided as necessary to protect State forests which are used primarily for timber production and other purposes.

The sum of \$11 790 is provided for monitoring populations of phasmid defoliators and other insects in valuable foothill and mountain eucalypt forests, as well as of needlecast fungi in pine plantations. The aerial photographic interpretation of forest diseases, in particular that of dieback caused by *Armillaria*, will be further refined.

The Commission's biological research programme for the protection and management of indigenous forests includes studies on the following:

Forest pests and diseases and their control, regeneration treatments, genetic variations and conservation, growth rates, management for wood products, wildlife and water quality, and tolerance of trees to salinity.

ITEM 3—EXTRACTION ROADS

This item provides for the construction of additional roads and improvements to existing roads and bridges in State forests.

The Commission must provide and maintain an efficient and adequate system of roads for the extraction of forest produce. These roads are used extensively by the general public for recreation and are essential also for forest management and protection but must, for these latter purposes, be augmented by a complementary system of secondary roads and fire protection and access tracks. The replacement programme for bridges will be a continuing one as timber bridges, built post-war to solve the then urgent housing problem, further deteriorate.

Roads totalling some 35 kilometres in length are listed for construction into new native forest logging areas including the developing regrowth stands from the 1939 fires and some 700 km of roads are to be improved. The increasing size of trucks used for carting forest produce requires that many of the older roads be widened, heavier surfacing be applied and bridges be widened and strengthened.

The larger processing plants, particularly the softwood-based industries, require large volumes of wood supplied continuously throughout the year. Heavy surfacing of the main roads is required for this traffic and is planned for a total of 110 km of road.

In many of the new maturing pine plantations, roads constructed for the establishment of the plantations must be improved and surfaced and additional roads constructed to enable the extraction of thinnings and final fellings.

Many of the Commission's fire protection and access tracks, established only for occasional use by light vehicles for management purposes, are now subjected to heavy and increasing use by the general public and must be improved, sometimes to two-wheel drive standard, in order to prevent or alleviate the effects of erosion, wear and damage brought about by this use. Over 500 km of these tracks are to be improved this year.

The works proposed are basically for the extraction of forest produce but in its programme for improvement of older roads and design of new roads the Commission must make provision for the increasing use of roads by the general public for recreation purposes.

ITEM 4—PLANTATION ESTABLISHMENT—SOFTWOODS AND HARDWOODS

The softwood planting programme for this year is 3800 ha. Plantings will be carried out in seven of the eight established plantation development zones, namely Upper Murray, Ovens, Benalla-Mansfield, Latrobe, Ballarat, Otway and

Portland, where large softwood forests are being created to provide raw material for major decentralized industries.

The area to be planted is a substantial increase on the area planted over recent years. The additional plantings will be located in two zones—Ovens (800 ha additional) and Latrobe (350 ha additional). These additional plantings are required to provide adequate wood resources for the future expansion and development of the wood processing industries drawing their wood supplies from the existing plantations in these zones.

These large decentralized industries are of major importance to the local economy of the respective regions and play a vital role in the Government's decentralization programme. Substantial expansion of these industries is currently being planned, and this expansion is dependent upon a guaranteed future source of raw material. The expanded Government plantings in each of these zones, which it is planned to continue in the future, will make a major contribution towards an increase in wood availability in the future, supplemented as necessary by wood from private plantings.

The aim is to have a substantial part of each year's softwood plantation programme on purchased farmland that is not required for agriculture and is suitable for plantation forestry. Within the limits of finance, suitable properties will be purchased as they become available at economic prices. Purchased lands are expected to be equivalent in area to about one-quarter of the area of new planting.

New roading will be constructed to provide access for plantation tending and protection. Improvement to this roading will be necessary in later years for the extraction of produce from thinnings and final fellings.

In addition to new plantings, 700 ha of softwood plantations clear felled to meet commitments to industry will be replanted.

The 7.4 million plants required for new plantations and for replanting will be raised at the Forests Commission nurseries at Benalla, Trentham and Rennick from genetically superior seed produced at the seed orchards at Daylesford and Ballarat.

In establishing new plantations, due regard will continue to be given to landscape, aesthetic and recreational requirements, and for the retention of adequate wildlife and natural plant habitats within each project.

Maintenance works, including the removal of scrub and fertilizing where necessary will be undertaken in young established plantations. Under the current Commonwealth Agreement with the State, assistance in the form of loans to cover some 40 per cent of the maintenance costs on plantations established under previous Commonwealth Agreements covering the period from 1 July 1966 to 30 July 1977 is available.

The establishment of hardwood plantations will continue in a number of districts throughout the State. The programme of reforestation in the Strzeleckis of South Gippsland will continue with the planting of a further 240 ha of eucalypts, mainly mountain ash, on purchased scrub covered marginal farms. Other significant plantings with eucalypts will be in the Central Highlands and in East Gippsland. Smaller plantations of local species will be established in northern and western Victoria.

Eucalypt seedlings required for the major programmes will be raised in nurseries associated with re-forestation prisons at Morwell River (Mirboo district) and Won Wron (Yarram district).

Prison labour, working under the technical supervision of Forests Commission staff will raise the seedlings and assist with plantings in nearby areas.

Research on plantation establishment, protection and management includes continuing studies in nursery techniques, improved seed quality, site productivity, fertilizer response and weed control, insects and diseases and irrigation of plantations with industrial and domestic wastewater.

ITEM 5—FOREST OFFICERS' QUARTERS, OFFICES AND OTHER BUILDINGS

A new district office at Toolangi will be commenced and major improvements will be carried out to several existing residences and to several district offices.

New depot buildings will be provided at some field stations to replace out-moded sheds and garages, to improve storage and garage facilities and to provide adequate amenities for Commission employés.

ITEM 6—PURCHASE OF LAND

Private property will be purchased by negotiation for addition to timber production forests and forest parks, for fire-protection purposes, and for office and residential accommodation.

Purchases of properties in the Dandenong Ranges will continue in accordance with the Government's policy for preservation of the area and its protection from fire.

Funds for acquisition of land for softwood plantation purposes are not included in this item.

ITEM 7—PURCHASE OF PLANT

This item provides for additions to fleet and the purchase of plant, vehicles and equipment not covered by the Forests Plant and Machinery Fund.

As necessary, additional vehicles will be purchased to provide Commission staff with vehicles suitable for their duties.

ITEM 8—FARM FORESTRY

The Government implemented the Farm Forestry Loan Scheme in 1966 to aid farmers to establish commercial plantations on their properties, hence providing them with the opportunity for additional and diversified income from land in a semi-productive or unproductive state. In addition these plantations would provide a source of raw material for local processing and so aid living and employment opportunities in rural areas.

The plantations are expected to provide returns so that after an interest free period the loan can be repaid. Favourable locations for plantations are regions on and south of the Great Dividing Range with reliable rainfall and well drained soils of reasonable depth.

Under the scheme up to \$200 per hectare to a maximum of \$8000 may be advanced to landowners to cover a high proportion of the costs incurred in successfully establishing a commercial plantation.

All loans are for a 25-year period being interest free for the first twelve years.

Since the inception of the scheme \$1 370 000 has been advanced to landowners to plant 8600 ha. Of this area a total of 6100 ha has been planted.

Technical advice and guidance on all aspects of tree and forest management are available to landowners from the network of forest offices throughout the State.

ITEM 9—TREE PLANTING INCENTIVE SCHEME

The recent proclamation of the *Forests (Amendment) Act* 1980 gives the Forests Commission authority to provide assistance to landowners, municipalities and other public bodies for tree planting, tree regeneration and forest management projects which provide benefits to the community at large.

The maximum value of assistance to any applicant in any one year is \$12 000 and will be given in the form of financial grants, supply of trees, assistance with works or provision of materials such as fencing. Each applicant will be expected to make a personal contribution towards the success of the tree growing project.

The prime objective of the new scheme is to encourage the planting and care of trees grown for non-commercial purposes. These include shelter-belt planting on farms, together with tree planting for amenity purposes, shade, restoration and provision of bird and animal habitat, and for ameliorating adverse soil and water conditions such as salinity.

The initial allocation of funds will be used for works programmes preparatory to the 1981 planting season.