Volume 69 *01/01/1982* Article 9

1-1-1981

Wood Production in Australia

Jana McConoughey
Iowa State University

Wood Production in Australia

by

JANA McCONOUGHEY

Recognizing the fact that over 75 percent of Australia's forests are used for wood production, it is hard to fathom how future wood production in that country could be in the doubtful state that it is in. Unfortunately, intensive management practices and public pressures are hindering the industry and considerable declines in production are expected.

To begin with, Australia's forest estate constitutes barely 6 percent of the country's total land area, most of it being composed of the genus Eucalyputs (table 1). Approximately 20 percent of the estate is privately forested land which, for the last 40 years, has provided one-third of sawlog production. Publicly owned forests have provided the remaining two thirds (table 2).

Public ownership is an important determinant of wood supply in Australia. Because of low wood pricing from public forests, non-industrial private forests have remained insignificant in terms of wood production.

There are several significant industrial forests which are private. However, the Australian Forest Services emphasize that most of the sawlog contributions of private lands are the results of land clearing operations. They add that there is no sign of private industries trying to maintain a yield for wood production, and that private contributions cannot be relied upon in the future.

So, the largest and most stable source of wood production in Australia, at the moment, is the publicly owned forest. But this too is changing. Following the trend of the United States, recreational use of forested land in Australia is rapidly increasing. Such outdoor activities as hiking, picnicing, rockclimbing and landscape painting are increasingly popular. Recreation is a welcome addition to the uses of the Australian forest, but with it comes the frequent dispute between nature and industry. Australia's public has begun to look with disfavor at the timber-producing role of the forests. It wants more and more land to be devoted to other uses such as recreation and parks.

Various forestry interest groups in Australia have been working to balance the country's dependence on public and private wood production. Traditionally, the reservation price (the lowest price at which the owner is prepared to sell his timber) of publicly owned land has been considerably lower than that of privately owned land. However, these interest groups have been successful in inducing public forest administrators to assign very high reservation prices to several public forests placing them in a more balance competition with the private lands.

Though wood production from public forests is battling public opposition, Australia's entire wood industry is facing the problems brought with intensive management. Increased fertilizer applications, wide spacing and weed control are leading to faster growth rates of the pines and eucalyptus which inhabit the country. Recent years have brought increasing comments, mainly from industry, on the effects this intensive management is having on conversion processes and end products. Trees are being harvested at younger ages with properties different from the trees used in previous years. Industries claim that conversion processes currently in use are not meant to handle the younger trees and that conversion will be slowed down until processes are changed to accommodate them.

Although fast-grown plantations present problems, it is generally accepted by Australian conservationists and forest planners that such plantations will be a necessary part of future wood production. Conflicts, however, will undoubtedly ensue between the two groups due to the fact that conservationists have reconciled to such a policy under the condition that no more native forests be cleared for conifer plantations. It is unlikely that forest planners will be able to abide due to economics and the unavailability of suitable cleared land.

Australia's wood production policy is now one of near self-sufficiency. Current trade barriers against many countries make it difficult to obtain wood imports and, because of the unstable trade situation, it is doubtful Australia will change its present policy in the near future. This makes expected production declines within the country all the more significant.

Production of hardwood sawlogs from native forests is estimated to decline from 6,815,000 m^3 in 1976 to 4,301,000 m^3 in 2020 (Shepherd 1979). Production forecasts of 1979 predict that, in order to make up for this loss, pine plantations will need to rise to 13,060,000m^3 by the year 2020 (table 3). It is also predicted that Australia will need to plant 310,000 ha. of

conifer plantations by 1990 to make up for a loss of pulpwood from native forest.

It is evident that Australia will need to rely more on fast-grown plantations in the future as native forests are used increasingly less for wood production. By changing conversion processes to accommodate the younger trees of such plantations, Australia can come to balance it dependence on public and private forests.

Although only 6 percent of Australia's total land area is forest, when one compares the availability of forests in relation to population, it is found that Australians have 10 times as much forest available to them as compared to, say, the Japanese, whose country is 60 percent forest estate. Hopefully, as people come to appreciate their forests for their recreational value, they will also realize the importance in wood production. A more balanced industry between public and private forests is now the concern of many groups throughout the country and it is being realized that current problems must be solved if Australia is to maintain a sufficient wood production industry.

Jana McConoughey is a student at Iowa State University majoring in Biology and minoring in Journalism.

Table 1. Area of forest types
(Carron 1979)

Forest Type	Area (million ha)
Eucalypt	30
Tropical eucalypt and paperback	7
Cypress pine	4
Rainforest	2
Total	43

Table 2. Area of commercial forests by production classes
(Carron 1979)

Production Class		Area (million ha)
	Reserved for wood production	12
Public	Not reserved for wood production but used for it	20
	Reserved, but wood production precluded	
Private	leased	9
	Alienated-freehold	9
	Total	43

Table 3. *Estimated use of wood resources in Australia (Shepherd 1979)*

	1976	2020
Sawlogs from native forests	6,815,000 m^3	4,300,000 m^3
Sawlogs from pine plantations		13,060,000 m^3
Pulpwood from native forests	Excess	Total required locally
Pulpwood from pine plantations		9,290,000 m^3