

Appendix 4

SUMMARY OF THE WATER FORUM

The capacity of native forests to provide the quantity and quality of water expected by the community, particularly in the Otways region of Victoria, was a key concern raised during the consultation period following the release of the West Victoria Comprehensive Regional Assessment. A forum to address this concern and increase understanding of the issues involved was held in Geelong on 1 December 1999. The objectives of the forum were to:

- increase understanding of the complexities of water quality and quantity issues in relation to forest management;
- share the knowledge of the scientific community about water quality and quantity research in relation to forest management;
- provide insight into the differing points of view in relation to these water and forest issues so that involvement in the RFA process reflects these greater understandings and insights;
- ensure that Commonwealth and Victorian officials are fully informed of the range of community views as they continue to develop the West Victoria Regional Forest Agreement.

Seven speakers, including researchers, managers and community group representatives presented their work on a range of topics at the forum.

- Pat O'Shaughnessy – a consultant in forest management specialising in water issues, addressed the regulation of forest and water issues in Victoria, including an historical review of research. He noted that codes of practice are an important aspect of regulating forest industries and that there is a need to widen the jurisdictions and application of codes of practice to include private as well as public land. He also explained that road crossings of streams are a significant source of sediment into catchments and need to be better managed.
- Tim Fletcher – Waterway Manager for the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority, spoke on local catchments, stream indexing, multiple use and the impacts on water. He noted that there are varying values placed on water and waterways by communities and that a range of impacts affect land and waterways in catchments. He indicated that while there is a need for long-term environmental monitoring, the streams in forested catchments in the Otways provide excellent water quality. The key components of monitoring stream condition are:
 - hydrology;
 - physical form;
 - riparian zone;
 - water quality; and
 - aquatic life.

- Chris Tipler from the Otway Ranges Environmental Network, spoke on water yield in the Otways. He presented an analysis to show that when the value of timber harvested in the Otways is compared to the value of water that is lost due to timber harvesting, there is no sound economic argument to support the continuation of logging in the Otways water supply catchments.
- Loris Duclos from the Wombat Forest Society, addressed ground water issues in the Midlands Forest Management Area. She raised concerns about selective application of scientific literature to support particular positions and she spoke on the care that needs to be taken in applying generic forest management rules at a local scale. The need for greater depth of knowledge in making decisions, especially such land use decisions as the West Victoria Regional Forest Agreement or the location of pine plantations, was stressed.
- Jacky Croke - a senior research scientist with CSIRO, spoke on forest operations and water quality. She discussed the need for continual improvement in best management practices to assist in the effective management of forests, as well as the need to re-evaluate the range of questions asked by scientists studying catchment processes and management. Jacky explained that sediment from roads is the major contributor to stream sedimentation during timber harvesting, with channelled flow the key sediment transportation mechanism.
- Rob Vertessy - the program leader in the Co-operative Research Centre for Catchment Hydrology, addressed forest operation and water yield, focussing on the effect of logging on stream flow. The decline in stream flow when old growth forests are replaced by regenerating forests, Rob explained, can be largely explained by the change in forest structure and growth rates. It is also related to climate and soil depth. The reduction in stream flow is greater in pine plantations than in native forests. The peak reduction in stream flow occurs within a few years after logging.
- Kylie White from the Victorian Department of Natural Resources and Environment, spoke on forest management planning processes, explaining the range of regulatory and prescriptive codes applying to the timber industry.

The Forum concluded with a summing up by the facilitator Michael Williams who stressed the need to recognise that forest management involves a complex suite of issues and that the values ascribed to forests are often based on personal values. As community values range across a broad spectrum, there is value in involving scientists, the community and policy makers in the debate. Forest management is about reconciling the different uses and values placed on those uses by the community.

A detailed record is in preparation and will be distributed shortly to the participants in the Water Forum. The record will also be available through the RFA web site www.rfa.gov.au.

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