

4. Forest Industries Equipment

a) The Opportunity

The Australian forestry industry is gearing itself for a rapid growth rate in the 1980s due to the increase in forestry reserves, particularly softwood plantings. From early plantings some 70 years ago, Australia has embarked on a sustained program of planting softwood, predominantly radiata pine, with a view to achieving near self-sufficiency in all grades of softwood products. Softwood grows quickly in Australia, producing first thinning pulpwood at 13 to 15 years and sawlogs or pulpwood on an integrated basis from 19 years to final crop at 35 to 45 years. With approximately 700,000 hectares (1,680,000 acres) currently planted out to pines, the program will continue at a rate of 25,000 hectares (60,000 acres) a year to reach an anticipated total area of 1.2 million hectares by the year 2000.

The swing away from indigenous eucalypt (hardwood) timbers is evidenced in the forecast that, by the end of this century, production of hardwood sawlogs or pulpwood will have fallen from 12.3 million cubic metres (435 million cu. ft.) to 11.2 million cubic metres (396 million cu. ft.) per year. By comparison, total annual production of softwood milling and processing will rise dramatically in the same period from 5.1 million to 13.3 million cubic metres (470 million cu. ft.). Few countries face such man-made wood resource expansion programs as does Australia today.

The softwood logging and sawmilling sectors have already experienced significant changes. Harvesting and tree processing units have replaced traditional chainsaw felling, and completely automated mills with high volume output have replaced the labor-intensive sawmill in the bush.

The next stage in Australia's development program will be an increase in the pulping capacity, geared to availability of resources. Projects valued at \$2.1 billion are at the planning stage or are considered viable. A recent survey showed that, by reason of their small domestic markets, the Australian and New Zealand pulp and paper producers will have to build large, specialized, export-oriented plants to take full advantage of the extra wood supplies.