

CHAPTER NINE

2020 VISION: ACCOUNTABILITY AND ACHIEVEMENT ISSUES

Introduction

9.1 The Committee has commented on Strategic Elements 1 to 4, and possible alterations or amendment to those Elements (see chapters 3 and 4). The Committee considers an important aspect of the revised *2020 Vision* is the addition of a specific Strategic Element to provide machinery for the systematic monitoring and review of the achievement of *2020 Vision* goals and the performance against expected outcomes in Strategic Elements 1 to 4.

9.2 Strategic Element 5 has as its description:

Monitoring the progress of the Plantations 2020 Vision, and supplying that information to a review process, is critical to delivering meaningful outcomes for Vision stakeholders. Monitoring should take into account not only progress against Vision Actions and the planted area target, but also the social, economic and environmental effects of plantation development, particularly for rural communities.¹

9.3 Under Action 16, the following goals are set:

- Review and report on progress against Vision Actions;
- Develop indicators for social environmental and commercial outcomes of the Plantations 2020 Vision; and
- Develop a Vision framework that is both reflective and forward looking.²

9.4 The responsibility for the implementation of Actions under Strategic Element 5 (Action 16) is stated as:

Coordinator, working with industry and Government representatives to review progress with implementing the Vision Actions. Coordinator to identify future activities required to maintain plantation investment and monitor the effects of 2020 Vision implementation.³

1 *2002 Revision, Plantations for Australia: The 2020 Vision – An Industry-Government initiative for plantation forestry in Australia*, p. 20.

2 *2002 Revision, Plantations for Australia: The 2020 Vision – An Industry-Government initiative for plantation forestry in Australia*, p. 20.

3 *2002 Revision, Plantations for Australia: The 2020 Vision – An Industry-Government initiative for plantation forestry in Australia*, p. 20.

- 9.5 Expected outcomes listed under Action 16 are:
- Identification of new or continuing plantation investment impediments that need to be addressed, and provision of options to overcome those impediments;
 - Identification of new opportunities to expand the plantation sector; and
 - Monitoring of social, environmental and economic outcomes of 2020 Vision Actions.⁴

Accountability

9.6 The Committee did not receive many views on how this Strategic Element was to be interpreted, and whether it might be amended or altered in light of, for example, experience in the development of the plantation industry since 1997. However, the Committee is of the view, particularly given the Tasmanian experience, that an accountability mechanism is critical to the development of a sustainable plantation industry. DC Mills from Tasmania indicated that:

All protection of the plantation industry from socially and ecologically sustainable planning legislation should be removed. Specifically it should be made accountable to regional communities through local government to ensure they meet local social and ecological needs.⁵

9.7 NAFI also noted that there have been a "broad range of misunderstandings and misconceptions about the expanding plantation section" which has led to the "build-up of community resentment to future plantation establishment in some areas".⁶

At the present time, it is difficult to quantitatively assess the progress of the 2020 Vision. The final action of the revised strategy indicates the importance of having adequate criteria for measuring the success or impact of the 2020 Vision. Not having quantifiable criteria in place is recognised as an impediment to the growth of the plantation estate as it becomes difficult for investors to gauge the outcomes of their investments and it allows community resentment to build up where there are concerns or misconceptions about the nature of the sector.⁷

9.8 NAFI recommended that "the final action of the revised *2020 Vision* should contain specific criteria for measuring the changes associated with implementing the revised strategy."⁸

4 *2002 Revision, Plantations for Australia: The 2020 Vision – An Industry-Government initiative for plantation forestry in Australia*, p. 20.

5 *Submission 23*, D.C. Mills, Social Learning and Research Agency, p. 4.

6 *Submission 32*, National Association of Forest Industries Ltd, p. 17.

7 *Submission 32*, National Association of Forest Industries Ltd, p. 17.

8 *Submission 32*, National Association of Forest Industries Ltd, p. 17.

9.9 The Committee notes that in the revised *2020 Vision*, the discussion on accountability focussed on internal accountability, and the issue of accountability to the wider community was not canvassed:

Industry is accountable to the executives and boards of the major forest industry groups – PTAA, AFG and NAFI, – for implementing the strategy to achieve the Vision. Each year industry will report on its progress through these industry groups.

The Australian Government and the State and Territory Governments will report to the Primary Industries Ministerial Council on progress towards the Vision.⁹

9.10 The Committee strongly believes that the accountability mechanism, combined with a role of identifying opportunities for development, research and investment should be encouraged. Given the government involvement, there should also be some accountability to the community at large.

Monitoring and Review of the 2020 Vision

9.11 The Committee notes that the revised *2020 Vision* makes the following provisions for monitoring and review of the *2020 Vision*:

The National Plantation Strategy Coordinator will prepare an annual report as soon as possible after 30 June each year, reporting on progress in implementing actions in the strategic framework for consideration by the Vision Partners. Progress towards the notional plantation area target will be reported through the National Plantation Inventory's annual tabular reports and major five-yearly reports on Australia's plantation.

The 2020 Vision framework will be reviewed every five years and revised as considered necessary with the next review and revision to be completed by the end of 2007.¹⁰

9.12 The Committee sought advice on a number of issues raised by the proposed monitoring and review structure. It referred them to the National Coordinator, Mr Rod Bristow, in March 2004 and addressed the following:

- the role and function of the Coordinator;
- funding arrangements for the Coordinator's office;
- the Coordinator's consultation plans;
- form of monitoring of social, environmental and economic outcomes (including the possible role for PFDC's and Private Forests Tasmania);
- reporting responsibility by the Coordinator;

9 *2002 Revision, Plantations for Australia: The 2020 Vision – An Industry-Government initiative for plantation forestry in Australia*, p. 7.

10 *2002 Revision, Plantations for Australia: The 2020 Vision – An Industry-Government initiative for plantation forestry in Australia*, p. 7.

- identification of new or continuing 'plantation investment impediments'; and
- a timetable for developing further fine-tuning of the *2020 Vision* to allow for a 'framework that is both reflective and forward looking'.¹¹

9.13 Mr Bristow gave the Committee the following advice on each issue:

Role and Function of the Coordinator

The Coordinator's role is to monitor the Vision partner's progress against each of the Actions in the Revised Vision. This role is managed by the PFCC, who have a 3-year plan and a more detailed 12-monthly set of tasks which highlight work to be done to achieve the Revised Vision Actions. As the Vision document is a 'living' document, these tasks constantly evolve in response to the changing environment related to plantation development. This is monitored by the PFCC in determining the priorities for the Coordinator's position.¹²

Funding Arrangements for the Coordinator's Office

The Coordinator's position is equally funded by the Commonwealth (one third, through DAFF), the States/Territories (one third, through the FFPC) and the industry (one third). The industry is represented by the National Association of Forest Industries, the Plantation Timber Association of Australia, and Australian Forest Growers. These funds are raised via invoice to each of the parties.¹³

Coordinator's Consultation Plans

The Coordinator works with the Vision partners; who are implementing the Vision actions directly and indirectly through their participation in plantation development. Also, in regard to appropriate indicators of social and environmental performance, the Coordinator plans to consult with the Bureau of Rural Sciences, the Private Forestry Development Committees (PFDC's) and Local Government to monitor the implementation of the Vision Actions.¹⁴

11 Correspondence to Mr Rod Bristow, National Strategy Coordinator from Committee, dated 25 February 2004.

12 Correspondence to the Committee from Mr Rod Bristow, National Strategy Coordinator, dated 1 March 2004, p. 4.

13 Correspondence to the Committee from Mr Rod Bristow, National Strategy Coordinator, dated 1 March 2004, p. 4.

14 Correspondence to the Committee from Mr Rod Bristow, National Strategy Coordinator, dated 1 March 2004, p. 4.

Form of Monitoring of Social, Environmental and Economic Outcomes and Possible Role for Regional Plantation Committees, Private Forest Development Committees and Private Forests Tasmania

The indicators developed for monitoring are likely to be adopted across all plantation regions, and focus on key factors like the total employment contribution of the plantation growing and processing industry, the environmental performance on [sic] plantations with regard to soil conservation and water quality protection, and water use by plantations. The PFDC's will be consulted on these issues; including Private Forests Tasmania with regard to the current and likely future range of issues associated with plantation development in Tasmania.¹⁵

Reporting Responsibility by the Coordinator

The Coordinator reports to the PFCC, and provides regular updates of progress against the Vision Actions. This information is available through the PFCC secretariat, currently run by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

The Coordinator's role is one of information gathering and dissemination. To this end, the process of utilising both print and electronic media is used extensively to convey messages related to plantations and plantation development. This information is published on the Plantations 2020 website.¹⁶

Identification of New or Continuing 'Plantation Investment Impediments'

A range of impediments to plantation investment are still prevalent, particularly related to inequities in the taxation system related to the timing of revenues from plantation forestry, and the lack of investment in new areas of long rotation plantations. The role of the Coordinator is to work with the Vision partners to identify impediments to investment, and to provide means of addressing these through the industry and government commitment to creating and enabling environment for plantation development.

The publishing of this information is at the discretion of the PFCC members, whose businesses may be affected by issues such as those identified by the Coordinator.¹⁷

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- 15 Correspondence to the Committee from Mr Rod Bristow, National Strategy Coordinator, dated 1 March 2004, p. 4.
- 16 Correspondence to the Committee from Mr Rod Bristow, National Strategy Coordinator, dated 1 March 2004, p. 5.
- 17 Correspondence to the Committee from Mr Rod Bristow, National Strategy Coordinator, dated 1 March 2004, p. 5.

Timetable for Developing a 'Vision Framework that is both Reflective and Forward Looking'

The Vision is subject to formal review every five years, at which time the issues and opportunities that have arisen during a period of plantation development are formally incorporated into a Revised Vision document (as evidenced by the recently completed review process). The Vision framework, in concert with this process, will evolve to be both analytical as well as predictive with regard to Australian plantation forestry.¹⁸

Comment

9.14 The central role of the Coordinator, in view of the advice provided to the Committee, will primarily be to advance the interests of plantation investment and development. The Committee considers these aims as valid and forward looking. However, it would sound a note of caution that, although the Coordinator works to advance the interests of the industry, the position should be free of political and industry interference in the conduct of the duties.

9.15 Further, the Committee wants to highlight two factors that should be given greater emphasis and be subject to more definite reporting requirements to be placed on the Coordinator. These are:

- Initiation, coordination and collection of research, particularly on the social, economic and environmental results of plantation development; and
- Timetabling and reporting on this and monitoring of the achievement of the whole range of *2020 Vision* goals.

Research and Monitoring of Social, Economic and Environmental Results of Plantation Development

9.16 Monitoring and analysis of the results of the program described to the Committee is dependent on coordinated research into the social, economic and environmental effects of the plantation industry. Issues seen as possible impediments under the *2020 Vision*, may also be properly seen as matters providing balance against excessively rapid development.

9.17 In addition, the existing framework of forestry development policy, including plantation forestry, needs a degree of government and industry coordination, either through the RFA process, or other cooperative arrangements.

9.18 Further, the level of current and continuing monitoring of the plantation forest estate – through the National Forest Inventory, ABARE and ABS figures and the BRS

18 Correspondence to the Committee from Mr Rod Bristow, National Strategy Coordinator, dated 1 March 2004, p. 5.

surveys of the national plantation estate – mean data on plantations is up-to-date and available. As well, BRS work and surveys carried out on social and economic changes and effects resulting from plantation development form a basis for assessment of achievement against those goals in Strategic Element 5. Establishing appropriate and meaningful benchmarks should not be a difficult task.

Timetabling and Reporting on Monitoring and Review of the 2020 Vision Goals

9.19 In view of the specific and detailed arrangements made for setting up a Coordinator's position, and the expectations of its performance, the Committee expects and anticipates that there should be an arrangement for reporting progress on the *2020 Vision* goals to the community at large.

9.20 The information provided to the Committee by the Coordinator in March 2004 suggests there is not such a program. The *2020 Vision* provides a timetable for a regular report from the Coordinator to the *2020 Vision* partners (the Commonwealth and State Governments and industry). Given the strong element of Commonwealth and state government contribution, the Committee believes that, with the exception of commercial-in-confidence or market information, all information gained by the Coordinator in the monitoring and review process should be available to the community, especially those communities where plantations may have become a central part of the local economy.

9.21 The Committee considers the most effective means of making these reports available would be for the responsible Minister to present the report to the Parliament.

9.22 The Committee sees considerable benefit in this proposal. It would enable parties interested in *2020 Vision* outcomes to share in the outcomes of the coordination and monitoring role. In case industry sees this proposal as a possible means of undermining the *2020 Vision* program, the Committee need only note that, to date, it is a lack of information on industry performance and priorities that has caused misunderstandings and controversy.

9.23 The Committee therefore makes the following recommendations.

Recommendation 14

9.24 The Committee recommends Strategic Element 5 be amended to provide that the National Plantation Strategy Coordinator prepare an annual report detailing the plantation industry's performance against the expected outcomes of each of the 14 principal Actions required by the *2020 Vision* program.

Recommendation 15

9.25 The Committee recommends that the National Plantation Strategy Coordinator's annual report also indicate the extent of research and/or assessment work (and results) carried out by the Coordinator, industry and other agencies, applicable to plantation development.

Recommendation 16

9.26 The Committee recommends that the National Plantation Strategy Coordinator's report is presented to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, and to the Minister for Environment and Heritage, and to the Ministers equivalent in each State.

Recommendation 17

9.27 The Committee recommends that the National Plantation Strategy Coordinator's report is tabled in the Commonwealth and State Parliaments within a month of the relevant Minister receiving it, so as to allow scrutiny by the parliament and the community of the achievement of *2020 Vision* goals.



**Aden Ridgeway, Senator for New South Wales
Chair**