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The conclusion to my service at VSF was somewhat untidy because I continued teaching the third year wood technology subject until the end of third term. The other teaching I had been doing was taken up by resident staff, but my offer to visit the School weekly for theory and practical classes filled an obvious need. The new Principal had some doubts about my motives and behaviour in this role, which was not my preference, but the students were in no doubt about it. I was glad when the early and late driving, and preparation for the classes finished.

The Commission saw that I was appointed to new duties, those of the Chief Forest Education Officer, responsible to the Chief, Division of Forestry Education and Research, for the development and implementation of forestry education programmes; to represent the Department on committees and at conferences; other duties as required.

My new tasks in Melbourne included assisting with negotiations for the affiliation of the VSF to the University; encouraging eligible foresters to undertake or complete a thesis for the Diploma of Forestry, Victoria, while this would continue to be available; providing some support for the work of the Board of Forestry Education; arranging short courses in television interviews for the most senior staff; and running forest excursions for administrative staff from head office. The excursions, the brainwave of the Chairman, were made to the forests near Toolangi. They provided office staff with glimpses of forests and forestry about which they had been ignorant for all their years with the Department. The Chairman's secretary, as senior as any in those ranks, was fascinated to see and touch mountain ash trees, to hold and smell some of their leaves, and see in the palm of her hand some seeds from which specimens of the tallest hardwood trees in the world could grow. She had been typing 'mountain ash' and '*Eucalyptus regnans*' for years but now she knew what it really was. A man who spent nearly all his working hours compiling records of pulpwood output from State forests watched sawlog and pulpwood harvesting for the first time, and remarked that he had often wondered what pulpwood looked like.

The Commission, or perhaps only its Chairman, became convinced in 1981 that senior officers could be switched around, according to a management fad of the time, the 'action learning' movement being promoted by Parkinson and others. The Chairman thought this could benefit individual officers and the organisation, with the result that one day the head of forest inventory was transferred into the chief forest education position, and I was nominated for a brand-new position of Policy Coordinator, again with no promotion involved. Nor, of course, prior discussion with me.

The Commission had decided that steps should be taken to document its policies clearly, and I was instructed to define existing and recommended policies as soon as practicable, in consultation with its most senior staff. So, in the July 1981, another chapter in my service with the Department began. The prospects for the new endeavour were exciting, but impetus was lacking. The Chairman foreshadowed meetings with me and the chiefs of the divisions to develop comprehensive policy statements, but they did not happen. This internal failure was reflected in the organisation chart in the Commission's annual report, in which the Policy Coordinator dangles forlornly. The chiefs of the divisions listened to me individually with politeness but did not respond effectively with policy ideas.

Whatever its faults, the new endeavour was overtaken in April 1982, when Labor was elected to government in Victoria, ending 27 years in opposition. The pent-up eagerness to implement Party policies brought immediate, cataclysmic changes to the activities of the Commission and to public forest management. There was no effective position for a policy officer in the ranks of foresters, for an adviser to the Minister arrived with him, on the Monday after the election, and Party committees assumed prescriptive and watchful roles. Office space was provided immediately for the full-time adviser to the Minister outside

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his office, and the three Commissioners of Forests, whose offices were nearby on the same floor, were effectively isolated from the new managers.

A ministerial review team of three men appeared and set about its wide-ranging tasks, using the services of Commission officers as they required, gathering information and compiling reports to satisfy terms of reference issued by the team.

The Minister required at least five Task Forces comprising middle and lower managers in the Commission to examine and report on hardwood and softwood future production, the Commission's relationships with other public land managers, the organisation of the Commission, the public image of the Commission, and fire prevention and fuel reduction burning. I was seconded to work full time as chairman of the timber production task force; comprising six of us.

The brief was received on 26 July 1982 and modifications we proposed were approved on 4 August. The task in front of us was huge, and the deadline for our report was the end of September. We presented it to the Minister on 30 September, taking satisfaction that our task force did not ask for any extension of time.

Of course we knew one another well, and this allowed us to work together very effectively and efficiently, to use a pair of words which were bandied about so much at the time. The administrative and draughting services of the Commission were freely available to the task force throughout. When October dawned there were six tired foresters, three of whom had lost substantial weight over the past weeks.

The report, of some 140 pages, and a supplementary report of some dozen pages submitted in October to indicate to the Minister preferred options for timber production, was published in March 1983 by the office of the Minister of Forests.

My work in the policy field fizzled out despite repeated requests for redrafts of papers by the Chairman. I was embroiled in tedious meetings and interviews of a group brought together to come up with a new budget framework for a consolidated department of public land management. The members came from the several land management agencies and the Department of Management and Budget. The Director-General, imported from England, came to some meetings, generating usually fruitless busy-work for us and successfully delaying some final report from the group. White boards and butchers' paper were filled with words and diagrams, but in my view signified little in the way of progress. The whole process included country trips to describe to regional assemblies of staff from the agencies, and ostensibly to gather input from them. Even when a trip took in most of two days it was hard for the staff to come to grips with the new scheme sufficiently to offer useful comments.

I was appalled when the convenor of the group said we would charter a plane for the Wangaratta and Horsham trips because foresters were accustomed to driving very early to arrive in time for an appointment, and then to drive back to headquarters in the evening. Not only did I think the cost of flying was unwarranted, especially when the pilot of a twin-engine plane cooled his heels all day while he guarded it, but I reckoned the arrival of a bunch of head office types by plane to mouth management jargon and draw on whiteboards, followed by their sudden departure to the airfield would not go down well. On those occasions when we went by car and stayed overnight the after-meeting talk with regional staff over a drink allowed quiet discussion and explanations of changes that seemed inevitable. I participated in these antics as cheerfully as I could.

Early in 1984 I was called to a Commissioner's office and told I had been seconded for about a year to assist a Board of Inquiry into the Timber Industry. I wound up what I had been doing at "Forestry House" in

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Bourke Street, and went to rooms in the old public offices in Treasury Place to report to Professor I S Ferguson, who would constitute the Board. The Board had three advisers, forestry, conservation, and economics. I shared a pleasant room with the conservation adviser, well known in green activist circles. His attitude to foresters was quickly apparent, which was a pity when we would be together for a year. Strangely, at the end of the year I knew little more about him than I did within the first month. The Board had an administrative officer seconded from the Commission's ranks, and employed a notably skilled and cheerful typist through an agency. The Treasury and Fitzroy gardens over the road added to the attractiveness of the new workplace.

The year went swiftly. The Board advertised interviews, by appointment, with individuals, and representatives of the timber industry, municipal, conservation, farming, and other organisations in many places in Victoria, in preparation for a program of public hearings in Melbourne and regional towns. Of the latter there were two rounds, the second following circulation of material gathered during the first hearings. The Board inspected many sawmills and other wood processing plants, and inspected a range of forest operations and forests. One of my tasks was to record aspects of these inspections in photographs and summary notes which were typed up for the files. As needed, I gathered information from libraries and from research foresters to answer or settle questions raised in hearings. During hearings the forestry and conservation advisers sat at small tables to the side of the Board's table, and noted on a card questions which Professor Ferguson might ask of someone appearing before the Board. The secretary, who administered the oath or affirmation to these persons, would carry cards to the main table as expedient. The proceedings were taped and transcripts were available the next day to interested parties. I enjoyed working in this unfamiliar situation, and learned to live with the wordless disapproval of the conservation adviser.

When I returned to head office, by then in Victoria Parade, I was astonished to be told that I would replace Dr David Flinn who had developed a new role, research coordinator of the new department, and was about to return to his former duties. After a few days starting to come to grips with the new challenge, I was summoned by the chief of the division to be told point blank that I was fired, because the Minister did not like me, and it was up to me to find a job in the Department. Within the hour I had packed my few things into two cartons and quit the office space I had so recently occupied.

I decided on the spot to share my news with a forester in the lands and forests division. He excused himself and returned with Dr Bob Smith, the director of the division, who pointed to an empty desk, "That's yours". So I became an executive assistant to the director until I left the department. Memorable tasks were developing the code of forest practices for timber harvesting in the State forests, and the Timber Industry Strategy adopted by the Government after laborious drafting and scrutiny. In some ways this was a time of triumph over adversity and disorder. It was encouraging during those final years to enjoy the confidence of workmates, knowing that one's contributions were valuable and upheld the ideals which had inspired a career in public forestry.

As my sixtieth birthday approached, the attractions of retirement from the fray became rosier, and in February 1989 I left.