

TREES GROW COMMUNITIES



Locals enthusiastic about plantation opportunities.



William, 2, is the fifth generation of a logging and milling dynasty as timber flows in the blood for Richard and Ted Rowe.

To say that Ted and Richard Rowe can't wait for eucalypt plantations to mature in and around Hamilton, deep in Victoria's Western District, is an understatement.

If you told them today that the trees would be ready tomorrow, they would have started logging yesterday.

Their enthusiasm at reaching out for tomorrow's beckoning forestry opportunities is particularly refreshing in a family business soon to celebrate 100 years in timber.

It's an enthusiasm tempered by uncertainty surrounding the possibility of a federal government about-face on Managed Investment Schemes (MIS).

They believe MIS, which are successfully attracting private investment in forestry plantations, have revitalised many declining or struggling regional economies and offer fresh opportunities for traditional logging and milling operations denied access to old native forests.

MIS, they point out, have enabled investment in the nearby South Australian Green Triangle forestry region (“forecasts are for 3.5 million tonnes of bluegums”) and more recently in a sweep of country from Digby, through Heywood to Bessiebelle and eastward towards Mortlake.

Millions of seedlings are being grown in Hamilton and Casterton for continuing bluegum expansion. And there’s talk of between 300 and 400 jobs being filled around Hamilton in 2010 when harvesting is in full swing.

They strongly believe all this momentum is attributable to investment because of MIS. Any change now to MIS would be viewed as a “serious” letdown.

“MIS are important,” says Ted. “There’s no doubt about it.

“The future of eucalypts and our company is closely and clearly linked to continuation of MIS.”

The Rowses’ passion for their industry, and the recent upswing in its prospects, is understandable. Timber is in their blood.

Ted, of the third generation, and son Richard, of the fourth, are current custodians of a logging and milling dynasty founded in the hardwood forests around Stawell, in Central Victoria, in 1909.

Brothers Charlie and Arthur started it. They were followed by Len and Malcolm, then Ted and Gavin, and now Ted’s son Richard with his son William, aged two and of the fifth generation, waiting in the wings.

The Rowses’ are remembered in timber across the years around Stawell, Edenhope, Barham, Brimpaen, Dimboola and Hamilton.

Fast forward to 2007 and you find Ted and Richard, rebadged as R. J. Rowe Pty Ltd, based on a 5.7 ha site the family bought in Coleraine Road, Hamilton in the 1950s.

Milling was retired six months ago and those saws stand idle.

Logging is in full swing, however, for it’s what Ted and Richard do best.

But until the new eucalypt plantations in the Hamilton region come on line, an R. J. Rowe crew of six, headed by Richard, is forced afield to log small independent softwood stands around Ballarat and Avoca.

Two traditional single-grip harvesters, a Timco and a Prentice, backed by two Rottne log forwarders, harvest around 1,000 tonnes most weeks.

The logs are trucked out on the company’s three B-doubles for preservation treatment by McVilly Timbers, Terang; for chipping at Ballarat Timber Processors; and for export through the Port of Geelong.

Ted sees this as a stop-gap measure until they can break into eucalypts when the hardwood plantations around Hamilton progressively come on line for harvesting within 12 to 18 months.

Richard agrees.

“We’ve done heaps of pine, but so far only 10,000 tonnes of bluegums,” he says.
“Our plant has a replacement cost approaching \$2.5 million. We can’t run the business long-term on what we’re doing now.

“We’ve got our business card out and we’re looking for more.

“We’ve got the right plant. We’ve got the know-how. And we’ve got the enthusiasm.

“We’re ready to go when the bluegums are ready.”