



PR 2001/158 - Income tax: Willmott Forests - 2000 Project

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Product Ruling

Income tax: Willmott Forests - 2000 Project

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Participants may wish to refer to the ATO's Internet site at <http://www.ato.gov.au> or contact the ATO directly to confirm the currency of this Product Ruling or any other Product Ruling that the ATO has issued.

Preamble

*The number, subject heading, and the **What this Product Ruling is about** (including **Tax law(s)**, **Class of persons** and **Qualifications** sections), **Date of effect**, **Withdrawal**, **Arrangement** and **Ruling** parts of this document are a 'public ruling' in terms of Part IVAAA of the **Taxation Administration Act 1953**. Product Ruling PR 1999/95 explains Product Rulings and Taxation Rulings TR 92/1 and TR 97/16 together explain when a Ruling is a public ruling and how it is binding on the Commissioner.*

No guarantee of commercial success

The Australian Taxation Office (ATO) **does not** sanction or guarantee this product. Further, we give no assurance that the product is commercially viable, that charges are reasonable, appropriate or represent industry norms, or that projected returns will be achieved or are reasonably based.

Participants must form their own view about the commercial and financial viability of the product. This involves a consideration of important issues such as whether projected returns are realistic, the 'track record' of the management, the level of fees in comparison to similar products, how this product fits an existing portfolio, etc. We recommend a financial (or other) adviser be consulted for such information.

This Product Ruling provides certainty for participants by confirming that the tax benefits set out below in the **Ruling** part of this document are available **provided that** the arrangement is carried out in accordance with the information we have been given and have described below in the **Arrangement** part of this document.

If the arrangement is not carried out as described below, participants lose the protection of this Product Ruling. Participants may wish to seek assurances from the promoter that the arrangement has been carried out as described in this Product Ruling.

Participants should be aware that the ATO will be undertaking review activities to confirm the arrangement has been implemented as described below and to ensure that the participants in the arrangement include in their income tax returns income derived in those future years.

Terms of Use of this Product Ruling

This Product Ruling has been given on the basis that the person(s) who applied for the Ruling, and their associates, will abide by strict terms of use. Any failure to comply with the terms of use may lead to the withdrawal of this Ruling.

What this Product Ruling is about

1. This Ruling sets out the Commissioner's opinion on the way in which the 'tax laws' identified below apply to the defined class of persons, who take part in the arrangement to which this Ruling relates. In this Ruling this arrangement is sometimes referred to as the Willmott Forests - 2000 Project, or simply as 'the Project'.

Tax law(s)

2. The tax law dealt with in this Ruling is:
- Division 35 of the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1997* ('ITAA 1997').

Goods and Services Tax

3. In this Ruling all fees and expenditure referred to include Goods and Services Tax ('GST') where applicable. In order for an entity (referred to in this Ruling as a 'Grower') to be entitled to claim input tax credits for the GST included in its expenditure, it must be registered or required to be registered for GST and hold a valid tax invoice.

Changes in the Law

4. The Government is currently evaluating further changes to the tax system in response to the *Ralph Review of Business Taxation* and continuing business tax reform is expected to be implemented over a number of years. Although this Ruling deals with the taxation legislation enacted at the time it was issued, later amendments may impact on this Ruling. Any such changes will take precedence over the application of this Ruling and, to that extent, this Ruling will be superseded.

5. Taxpayers participating in the Project are advised to confirm with their taxation adviser that changes in the law have not affected this Product Ruling since it was issued.

Note to promoters and advisers

6. Product Rulings were introduced for the purpose of providing certainty about tax consequences for participants in projects such as this. In keeping with that intention, the Tax Office suggests that promoters and advisers ensure that participants are fully informed of any legislative changes after the Ruling is issued.

Class of persons

7. The class of persons to whom this Ruling applies is the persons who are more specifically identified in the Ruling part of Product Ruling PR 2000/3 and who, between 16 February 2000 and 31 March 2000, entered into the specified arrangement that is set out in paragraphs 13 to 33 of that Ruling. They will have a purpose of staying in the arrangement until it is completed (i.e., being a party to the relevant Agreements until their term expires) and deriving assessable income from this involvement. In this Ruling these persons are referred to as 'Growers'.

8. The class of persons to whom this Ruling applies does not include persons who have terminated or who intend to terminate their involvement in the arrangement prior to its completion, or who otherwise do not intend to derive assessable income from the Project.

Qualifications

9. The Commissioner rules on the precise arrangement identified in the Ruling. If the arrangement described in the Ruling is materially different from the arrangement that is actually carried out, the Ruling has no binding effect on the Commissioner. The Ruling will be withdrawn or modified.

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Date of effect

11. This Ruling applies prospectively from 28 November 2001 for Growers who, between 16 February 2000 and 31 March 2000, entered into the arrangement that is set out in paragraphs 13 to 33 of Product Ruling PR 2000/3. However, the Ruling does not apply to taxpayers to the extent that it conflicts with the terms of settlement of a dispute agreed to before the date of issue of the Ruling (see paragraphs 21 and 22 of Taxation Ruling TR 92/20).

12. If a taxpayer has a more favourable private ruling (which is legally binding), the taxpayer can rely on that private ruling if the

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income year to which it relates has ended or has commenced but not yet ended. However if the arrangement covered by the private ruling has not commenced, and the income year to which it relates has not yet commenced, this Ruling applies to the taxpayer to the extent of the inconsistency only (see Taxation Determination TD 93/34).

Withdrawal

13. This Product Ruling is withdrawn and ceases to have effect after 30 June 2002. Even following its withdrawal, this Ruling continues to apply, in respect of the tax laws ruled upon, to all persons within the specified class who, between 16 February 2000 and 31 March 2000, entered into the specified arrangement that is set out in paragraphs 13 to 33 of Product Ruling PR 2000/3. This is subject to there being no material difference in the arrangement or in the persons' involvement in the arrangement.

Arrangement

14. The arrangement that is the subject of this Ruling is described in paragraphs 13 to 33 of Product Ruling PR 2000/3.

Ruling

Continuing application of Product Ruling PR 2000/3

15. Although now withdrawn, the tax benefits set out in Product Ruling PR 2000/3 continue to apply to participants who are within the specified class of persons to which the Ruling applied and who entered into the specified arrangement between 16 February 2000 and 31 March 2000. This is subject to there being no material difference in the arrangement or in the persons' involvement in the arrangement.

Division 35 – Deferral of losses from non-commercial business activities

Section 35-55 – Commissioner's discretion

16. For a Grower who is an individual and who entered the Project between 16 February 2000 and 31 March 2000 the rule in section 35-10 may apply to the business activity comprised by their involvement in this Project. Under paragraph 35-55(1)(b) the Commissioner has decided for the income years ended 30 June 2001 to 30 June 2015 that the rule in section 35-10 does not apply to this

business activity. This is provided that the Project has been, and continues during the remainder of the term of the Project, to be carried on in a manner that is not materially different to that described in the arrangement that is set out in paragraphs 13 to 33 of Product Ruling PR 2000/3.

17. This exercise of the discretion in subsection 35-55(1) will not be required where, for any year in question:

- the 'exception' in subsection 35-10(4) applies (see paragraph 23 in the Explanations part of this ruling, below);
- a Grower's business activity satisfies one of the tests in sections 35-30, 35-35, 35-40 or 35-45;
- the Grower's business activity produces assessable income for an income year greater than the deductions attributable to it for that year (apart from the operation of subsection 35-10(2); or
- the Commissioner is precluded from exercising the discretion under paragraph 35-55(1)(b) because of subsection 35-55(2).

18. Where, the exception in subsection 35-10(4) applies, or the Grower's business activity satisfies one of the tests, or the discretion in subsection 35-55(1) is exercised section 35-10 will not apply. This means that a Grower will not be required to defer any excess of deductions attributable to their business activity in excess of any assessable income from that activity, i.e., any 'loss' from that activity, to a later year. Instead, this 'loss' can be offset against other assessable income for the year in which it arises.

19. Growers are reminded of the important statement made on Page 1 of this Product Ruling. Therefore, Growers should not see the Commissioner's decision to exercise the discretion in paragraph 35-55(1)(b) as an indication that the Tax Office sanctions or guarantees the Project or the product to be commercially viable. An assessment of the Project or the product from this perspective has not been made.

Explanations

Division 35 – Deferral of losses from non-commercial business activities

20. Division 35 applies to losses from certain business activities for the income year ended 30 June 2001 and subsequent years. Under the rule in subsection 35-10(2), a deduction for a loss made by an

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individual (including an individual in a general law partnership) from certain business activities will not be taken into account in an income year unless:

- the exception in subsection 35-10(4) applies;
- one of four tests in sections 35-30, 35-35, 35-40 or 35-45 is met; or
- if one of the tests is not satisfied, the Commissioner exercises the discretion in section 35-55.

21. Generally, a loss in this context is, for the income year in question, the excess of an individual taxpayer's allowable deductions attributable to the business activity over that taxpayer's assessable income from the business activity.

22. Losses that cannot be taken into account in a particular year of income, because of subsection 35-10(2), can be applied to the extent of future profits from the business activity, or are deferred until one of the tests is passed, the discretion is exercised, or the exception applies.

23. For the purposes of applying Division 35, subsection 35-10(3) allows taxpayers to group business activities 'of a similar kind'. Under subsection 35-10(4), there is an 'exception' to the general rule in subsection 35-10(2) where the loss is from a primary production business and the individual taxpayer has other assessable income for the income year from sources not related to that activity, of less than \$40,000 (excluding any net capital gain). As both subsections relate to the individual circumstances of Growers who participate in the Project they are beyond the scope of this Product Ruling and are not considered further.

24. In broad terms, the tests require:

- (a) at least \$20,000 of assessable income in that year from the business activity (section 35-30);
- (b) the business activity results in a taxation profit in 3 of the past 5 income years (including the current year) (section 35-35);
- (c) at least \$500,000 of real property, or an interest in real property, (excluding any private dwelling) is used on a continuing basis in carrying on the business activity in that year (section 35-40); or
- (d) at least \$100,000 of certain other assets (excluding cars, motor cycles and similar vehicle) are used on a continuing basis in carrying on the business activity in that year (section 35-45).

25. A Grower who was accepted into and who has participated in the Project since 16 February 2000 is carrying on a business activity that is subject to these provisions.

26. Information provided with the application for Product Ruling PR 2000/3 and additional information provided since, indicates that a Grower who acquired the minimum allocation of one interest(s) in the Project is unlikely to have their business activity pass one of the tests until the income year ended 30 June 2025. Growers who acquired more than one interest(s) in the Project may however, find that their activity meets one of the tests in an earlier income year.

27. Prior to this time, unless the Commissioner exercises an arm of the discretion under paragraphs 35-55(1)(a) or (b), the rule in subsection 35-10(2) will apply to defer to a future income year any loss that arises from the Grower's participation in the Project.

28. The first arm of the discretion in paragraph 35-55(1)(a) relates to 'special circumstances' applicable to the business activity, and has no relevance for the purposes of this Product Ruling. However, the second arm of the discretion in paragraph 35-55(1)(b) may be exercised by the Commissioner where:

- (i) the business activity has started to be carried on;
- (ii) because of its nature, it has not yet met one of the tests set out in Division 35; and
- (iii) there is an expectation that the business activity of an individual taxpayer will either pass one of the tests or produce a taxation profit within a period that is commercially viable for the industry concerned.

29. The information provided by the applicant indicates that a Grower who acquired the minimum allocation of one interest(s) in the Project is expected to be carrying on a business activity that will either pass one of the tests, or produce a taxation profit, for the year ended 30 June 2016. The Commissioner has decided for such a Grower that it would be reasonable to exercise the second arm of the discretion until the year ended 30 June 2015. Subsection 35-55(2) prevents the Commissioner exercising the discretion for these Growers beyond the year ended 30 June 2015.

30. The applicant has stated that the business activity comprised by a Grower's involvement in this Project has started to be carried on, and will continue to be carried on in a manner that is not materially different to that described in the arrangement that is set out in paragraphs 13 to 33 of Product Ruling PR 2000/3. If, however, the Project is not carried on during the income years specified above (see paragraph 16), in the manner described in the arrangement in Product Ruling PR 2000/3 this Ruling may be affected. Specifically, the decision in relation to paragraph 35-55(1)(b), that it would be

unreasonable that the loss deferral rule in subsection 35-10(2) not apply, may be affected, because the Ruling no longer applies (see paragraph 9). Growers may need to apply for private rulings on how paragraph 35-55(1)(b) will apply in such changed circumstances.

31. In deciding to exercise the discretion in paragraph 35-55(1)(b) the Commissioner has relied upon:

- the Consultant Forester's Report provided with the application by the Responsible Entity; and
- independent, objective, and generally available information relating to the afforestation industry which substantially supports cash flow projections and other claims, including prices and costs, in the Product Ruling application submitted by the Responsible Entity.

Detailed contents list

32. Below is a detailed contents list for this Product Ruling:

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Commissioner of Taxation28 November 2001

Previous draft:

Not previously issued in draft form

- tax shelters
- tax shelters project

*Related Rulings/Determinations:*PR 2000/3; PR 1999/95; TR 92/1;
TR 92/20; TR 97/16; TD 93/34*Legislative references:*

- TAA 1953 Part IVAAA
- ITAA 1997 Div 35
- ITAA 1997 35-10
- ITAA 1997 35-10(2)
- ITAA 1997 35-10(3)
- ITAA 1997 35-10(4)
- ITAA 1997 35-30
- ITAA 1997 35-35
- ITAA 1997 35-40
- ITAA 1997 35-45
- ITAA 1997 35-55
- ITAA 1997 35-55(1)
- ITAA 1997 35-55(1)(a)
- ITAA 1997 35-55(1)(b)
- ITAA 1997 35-55(2)

Subject references:

- carrying on a business
- commencement of business
- fee expenses
- interest expenses
- management fees
- producing assessable income
- product rulings
- public rulings
- taxation administration
- tax avoidance
- tax benefits under tax avoidance schemes

ATO references:

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