

# ***PR 2002/117 - Income tax: Willmott Forests Project - 2000 Prospectus No. 2***



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This document has changed over time. This is a consolidated version of the ruling which was published on *2 October 2002*



## Product Ruling

### Income tax: Willmott Forests Project – 2000 Prospectus No. 2

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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**

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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**

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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

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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 refers. In this Ruling this arrangement is sometimes referred to as Willmott Forests Project – 2000 Prospectus No. 2 or simply as 'the Project'.

### Tax laws

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 who are 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 those persons who are more specifically identified in the Ruling part of this Product Ruling and who were accepted into the Project on or after 3 April 2000 but before 28 February 2001. 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**

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11. This Ruling applies prospectively from 2 October 2002 for Growers who, on or after 3 April 2000 but before 28 February 2001, entered into the specified arrangement that is set out below. 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 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

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13. This Product Ruling is withdrawn and ceases to have effect after 30 June 2003. The Ruling continues to apply, even following its withdrawal, in respect of the tax laws ruled upon, to all persons within the specified class who entered into the specified arrangement that is set out below on or after 3 April 2000 but before 28 February 2001. This is subject to there being no material difference in the arrangement or in the persons' involvement in the arrangement.

## Arrangement

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14. The arrangement that is the subject of this Ruling is specified below. This description incorporates the following documents:

- Applications for Product Rulings dated 20 December 2001 and 31 January 2002;
- Willmott Forests Project – 2000 Prospectus No. 2 ('the Prospectus');
- **Constitution – Willmott Forests 2000 Project** ('the Constitution');
- **Proforma Lease Agreement** between Willmott Forests Limited ('WFL') and the Grower;
- **Proforma Forestry Management Agreement** between WFL and the Grower;
- Compliance Plan for WFL as the Responsible Entity; and
- Correspondence and attachments from Willmott Forests Limited and its Taxation Advisors dated 16 April 2002, 29 July 2002 and 21 August 2002.

**Note: certain information has been provided on a commercial-in-confidence basis and will not be disclosed or released under Freedom of Information legislation.**

15. The documents highlighted are those which Growers entered into or became a party to. There are no other agreements, whether formal or informal, and whether or not legally enforceable, which a Grower, or any associate of the Grower, was or is a party to.

### **Overview**

16. This arrangement is called the Willmott Forests Project – 2000 Prospectus No. 2.

Location	Delegate, New South Wales
Type of business each participant is carrying on	Commercial forestry
Tree species	<i>Pinus radiata</i>
Minimum number of Hectares than can be subscribed for	1 Hectare
Minimum number of trees per Hectare	1,000
Term of Project	25 years
Initial cost per hectare  For applications received on or before 30 April 2000 -  For applications received after 30 April 2000 -	  \$5,033  \$5,720
Other costs to Growers	Fire insurance premiums after year 10 if a Grower so desires. Growers will also incur harvesting / marketing costs.

17. Growers participating in the Project entered into a Lease Agreement and Forestry Management Agreement. Growers leased an area of land called a 'Hectare' from WFL for 24 years. Growers must have applied for a minimum of 1 Hectare.

18. Subscription to the Project was offered through the Prospectus which was lodged with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission ('ASIC'). All ASIC requirements are, or will be, complied with for the term of the agreements. The effect of the agreements may be summarised as follows.

## **Lease Agreement**

19. The Lease was granted by WFL ('lessor') to Growers ('lessee') under the terms of the Lease Agreement. Growers were granted an interest in land in the form of a lease to use their Hectare for the purposes of conducting their afforestation business, including the right to harvest timber grown on the Hectare. The lease is for 24 years and may be extended by 5 years or until such time as the trees have been harvested and the land made good, whichever is the sooner.

20. The lessee shall not use the land jointly with anyone else and retains the right to say when the trees are to be planted. If the lessee breaches any conditions, the lessor may enter the land to remedy the breaches at cost to the lessee. If the lessee defaults, the lessor can re-enter the land. Re-entry by the lessor ends the lease but the lessor retains all rights under the general law including the right to sue the lessee for unpaid money or for damages for breaches of the lessee's obligations under the lease.

## **Forestry Management Agreement**

21. A Forestry Management Agreement was entered into between WFL ('the Manager') and each Grower. Growers contracted with the Manager to establish and maintain the plantation in accordance with good forestry practices. WFL may delegate its responsibilities. This agreement also provides that the Manager will arrange and pay for public liability insurance for the term of the Project and for fire insurance until Year 10. After Year 10 the decision to further insure will be the Grower's responsibility.

22. Part 1 of the Forestry Management Agreement stipulates the establishment services that were undertaken by the Manager and these were as follows:

### ***Part 1 – preparation and planting***

- Planning – development of Plantation Establishment Plan;
- Soil testing;
- Allocation and survey – in field work, setting out firebreaks and access ways;

- Preparation works – ripping and/or ploughing;
- Pre-planting weedicide treatments as required;
- Supply and planting *Pinus radiata* seedlings at a minimum rate of 1,000 per Hectare;
- Consultant Forester's fees and expenses; and
- Public Risk Insurance.

23. Part 2 of this agreement stipulates the on-going maintenance services to be provided by the Manager from second year to clear fell and these are as follows:

***Part 2 – Maintenance***

- Second year (after planting), including;
  - Replanting where required,
  - Treatment of regrowth,
  - Post-planting weedicide treatments as required,
  - Folia analysis of planted stock,
  - Fertilising where required,
  - Construction of access roads and firebreaks, and
  - General maintenance.
- Third year, general maintenance, including attention to regrowth, access roads and firebreaks, fertilising, where required;
- Fourth year, general establishment work and maintenance including attention to regrowth, access roads and firebreaks;
- Fifth to twenty-fifth year, further fertilising, general maintenance including attention to regrowth, access roads, firebreaks and selective pruning;
- Fire insurance for period of 9 years from second year of the Project to the tenth year of the Project (both inclusive); and
- Public Risk Insurance for the period from second year of the Project to the twenty-fifth year of the Project.

**Harvesting and Marketing**

24. Harvesting of the trees and marketing of timber are the Grower's decision. The Grower may engage the Manager to arrange



for these services to be carried out at the appropriate time or make other arrangements to harvest and market the timber. The Manager's fees for doing so will be 5% of Gross Timber Proceeds. Harvesting is anticipated to be undertaken in years 16 (1<sup>st</sup> thinning), 20 (2<sup>nd</sup> thinning) and 25 (Clear fell).

### **Constitution**

25. The Constitution sets out the terms and conditions under which WFL agrees to act for the Growers and to manage the Project. The Constitution also deals with the establishment and operation of a Future Maintenance Account. According to the Prospectus, the funds in this account will progressively become available to the Manager after year 11 for the purpose of maintaining the plantation until maturity. At the conclusion of the Project the Manager must realise the Assets. This must be completed in 180 days if practical and in any event as soon as possible after that. The procedures that must be followed on termination are provided in clause 18 of the Constitution.

### **Project Fees**

26. The fees per Hectare payable under the Lease and Forestry Management Agreements are as follows.

#### ***Part 1 - fees payable under the Forestry Management Agreement***

##### *For Applications received on or before 30 April 2000*

Option A (Cash) - \$5,000 payable upon application

Option B - deposit of \$100 payable upon application and balance of \$4,900 payable within 30 days

Option C - deposit of \$1,000 payable upon application and balance of \$4,000 payable in equal monthly installments over 24 months (interest free)

##### *For Applications received after 30 April 2000*

Option A (Cash) - \$5,500 payable upon application

Option B - deposit of \$100 payable upon application and balance of \$5,400 payable within 30 days

Option C - deposit of \$1,000 payable upon application and balance of \$4,500 payable in equal monthly

installments over 24 months  
(interest free).

***Part 2 - fees payable under the Forestry Management Agreement***

Annual maintenance fee of \$110 from years 2 to 11 inclusive payable quarterly in arrears **plus** 5% of gross timber proceeds received from thinning and clear fell of trees on each Hectare of the Leasehold property.

***Rent payable under the Lease Agreement***

For the period 1 May 2000 to 30 June 2000 - \$33.33

For the period 1 July 2000 to 30 June 2010 - \$220/p.a., payable quarterly in arrears

For the period 1 July 2010 to 30 April 2024 - \$220/p.a., CPI adjusted, payable quarterly in arrears with pro rata adjustments for lesser period

**Finance**

27. Growers may have funded their participation in the Project themselves or borrowed from an independent lender. No entity or related entity involved in the Project was involved in the provision of financing for the Project.

28. This Ruling does not apply if the finance arrangement entered into by the Grower includes or has any of the following features:

- there are split loan features of a type referred to in Taxation Ruling TR 98/22;
- there are indemnity arrangements or other collateral agreements in relation to the loan designed to limit the borrower's risk;
- 'additional benefits' are or will be granted to the borrowers for the purpose of section 82KL or the funding arrangements transform the Project into a 'scheme' to which Part IVA may apply;
- the loan or rate of interest is non-arm's length;
- repayments of the principal and payments of interest are linked to the derivation of income from the Project;
- the funds borrowed, or any part of them, will not be available for the conduct of the Project but will be transferred (by any mechanism, directly or indirectly) back to the lender or any associate of the lender;

- lenders do not have the capacity under the loan agreement, or a genuine intention, to take legal action against defaulting borrowers; or
- entities associated with the Project are involved or become involved in the provision of finance to Growers for the Project.

## Ruling

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### Application of this Ruling

29. This Product Ruling applies to Growers who will engage the Manager to arrange for the harvesting of the trees and marketing of timber.

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

#### Section 35-55 – Commissioner’s discretion

30. For a Grower who is an individual and who entered the Project on or after 3 April 2000 but before 28 February 2001 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 will decide for the income years ending 30 June 2001 to 30 June 2024 that the rule in section 35-10 does not apply to this activity provided that the Project is carried out in the manner described in this Ruling.

31. 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 37 in the Explanations part of this ruling, below); or
- a Grower’s business activity satisfies one of the tests in sections 35-30, 35-35, 35-40 or 35-45; or
- a 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)).

32. Where the ‘exception’ in subsection 35-10(4) applies, 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.

33. 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**

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### **Division 35 - Deferral of losses from non-commercial business activities**

34. 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 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.

35. 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.

36. 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.

37. 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 activity 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.

38. 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 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 vehicles) are used on a continuing basis in carrying on the business activity in that year (section 35-45).

39. A Grower participating in the Project is carrying on a business activity that is subject to these provisions. Information provided with the application for this Product Ruling indicates that a Grower who acquired the minimum allocation of one Hectare is unlikely to have their activity pass one of the tests until the income year ended 30 June 2025. Growers who acquired more than one interest in the Project may however, find that their activity meets one of the tests in an earlier income year.

40. Therefore, 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.

41. 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 where the business activity has started to be carried on and for that, or those income years:

- (i) because of its nature, it has not yet met one of the tests set out in Division 35; and
- (ii) 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.

42. Information provided with this Product Ruling application indicates that a Grower who acquired the minimum allocation of one Hectare in the Project is expected to be carrying on a business activity

that will pass one of the tests in the income year ended 30 June 2025 or will produce a taxation profit, for the income years ended 30 June 2016 and 30 June 2020.

43. The Commissioner will decide for such a Grower that it would be reasonable to exercise the second arm of the discretion for all income years up to, and including the income year ended 30 June 2024. The taxation profit that is projected for the income years ended 30 June 2016 and 30 June 2020 do not affect the period of the Commissioner's discretion as they are considered to be 'one-off' events that are specific to the afforestation industry.

44. 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 14 to 28 of this Product Ruling. If, however, the Project is not carried on during the income years specified above (see paragraph 30), in the manner described in the arrangement, 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.

45. In deciding that the second arm of the discretion in paragraph 35-55(1)(b) will be exercised on this conditional basis, the Commissioner has relied upon:

- the Consultant Forester's Reports provided with the application;
- Grower's Report 2001; and
- independent, objective, and generally available information relating to the afforestation industry.

## **Detailed contents list**

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

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**Commissioner of Taxation**

2 October 2002

*Previous draft:*

Not previously issued in draft form

- management fee expenses
- producing assessable income
- product rulings
- public rulings
- schemes and shams
- taxation administration
- tax avoidance

*Related Rulings/Determinations:*

TR 92/1; TR 92/20; TD 93/34;  
TR 97/16; TR 98/22; PR 1999/95

*Subject references:*

- carrying on a business
- commencement of business
- fee expenses
- interest expenses

*Legislative references:*

- TAA 1953 Part IVAAA
- ITAA 1936 Part IVA
- ITAA 1936 82KL

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FOI status: **may be released**

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| - ITAA 1997 Div 35   | - ITAA 1997 35-40       |
| - ITAA 1997 35-10    | - ITAA 1997 35-45       |
| - ITAA 1997 35-10(2) | - ITAA 1997 35-55       |
| - ITAA 1997 35-10(3) | - ITAA 1997 35-55(1)    |
| - ITAA 1997 35-10(4) | - ITAA 1997 35-55(1)(a) |
| - ITAA 1997 35-30    | - ITAA 1997 35-55(1)(b) |
| - ITAA 1997 35-35    |                         |
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ATO references:

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