

ORANGE RIVER PROJECT

The co-ordinated scheme to harness the waters of the Orange River, announced by the Minister of Water Affairs, holds promise that Escom may be able to build hydro-electric power stations and develop new networks in the upper reaches of the Orange River and in the Fish River valley.

The greater part of these valleys are outside Escom's present licensed areas: but the proximity of existing Undertakings is shown on the map of the Commission's Undertakings.

The primary objectives of the Orange River Project are conservation and control of water for irrigation and urban industrial use: but Escom has informed the Government of its great interest in the hydro-electric power potential, and has agreed in principle, subject to its being granted the necessary borrowing powers, that it will accept responsibility for financing, construction and operation of the power stations and electrical distribution networks at places where hydro-electric power development is practicable and offers economic advantage. Hydro-electric development will be on the basis that water will not normally be used solely for the generation of electricity; and, on that account, the hydro-electric projects will not be burdened with any portion of the capital costs of dams and canals or any charge for water passing through the turbines. Electricity will thus be a by-product generated by means of the minimum flow in the river or the discharge of water for other uses.

Although the hydro-electric power potential in the early stages of the Orange River Project appears small in relation to the size of sets being installed in Escom's new thermal stations, the economic possibilities at each point will be studied in collaboration with the Department of Water Affairs and in the light of the requirements of potential consumers in the area.