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Combined Draft 2 – 19 June, 1998

Strategic Plan

for the

Farm Forestry Unit

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Context

This Plan outlines the Farm Forestry Unit's role in developing and stimulating adoption of farm forestry by the owners of agricultural land in the southwest of WA.

Farm forestry can often compete as an option for the use of agricultural land entirely on its commercial wood production merits. However, our agriculture has some fundamental flaws i.e. it creates an adverse water balance (and the range of consequences commonly called 'salinity'), has excessive exposure to wind and causes loss of biodiversity. These flaws are manifest in extensive land degradation and a clearly unsustainable agriculture.

The State Salinity Plan recognizes the need for extensive revegetation with woody perennials to arrest salinity. It specifies the need for some 3 million ha of revegetation. Revegetation on this scale would also be effective in relieving the other forms of land degradation. The scale, cost (some \$3 billion) and wide dispersal necessary for revegetation indicate that it must be largely self-financing and attract a substantial management commitment by landowners.

Hence the need to build a sustainable agriculture provides a powerful extra motivation for the development of tree crops and the implementation of farm forestry on a scale never before entertained.

The form of farm forestry required to achieve the dual objectives of commercial viability and sustainable agriculture has been called integrated farm forestry. It involves incorporating tree crops into the farming enterprise in a way that enhances overall farm productivity and sustainability.

The Farm Forestry Unit has a predominant but not exclusive focus on integrated farm forestry.

In the higher rainfall areas there are several tree cropping options for farm forestry. In this area the Unit's role is mainly to stimulate adoption of farm forestry. In the low rainfall areas there are no current tree crop options and the Unit has a species, product and industry development role.

The purpose of this Plan is to define the Unit's promotional and developmental activities for the next two years.

Background

Description of the Business

The Unit's business ranges from development to implementation of farm forestry.

Development consists of pioneering work in new tree crop species, their production systems, products and industries. It includes selection of priority development areas, pre-feasibility investigation, exploring and developing the technical, environmental and commercial potential of new prospects, existing industries or native forestry, business and industry planning and instigating new industries.

Implementation involves stimulating interest, understanding and adoption of farm forestry by the wider community, especially farmers. It concentrates on packaging farm forestry into several services that enable groups and individuals to raise their confidence and get started in farm forestry. The services include planning, demonstration of establishment and management practices and training in farm forestry. They are directed at the spectrum of potential growers from small to industrial-scale, from those interested in joint venture arrangements to those who will do it themselves.

The Unit coordinates its activities with key stakeholders, such as Agriculture WA, Regional Initiative Groups, the landcare movement, professional advisers, commercial operators and reinforces key state and national policy initiatives such as the State Salinity Action Plan and Plantations Vision 2020.

Vision

To achieve the State Salinity Plan target of 1.5 million ha commercial tree crops integrated into the State's 18 million ha of agricultural land within 30 years.

Mission Statement

The Unit will develop tree crop species, products, production systems, industries and markets and stimulate the adoption of integrated farm forestry.

Objectives

Directional objectives (3 to 5 year horizon)

Development:

- To support oil mallee development to the point of commercial success.
- To identify a suite of potential commercial species and products for wheatbelt tree crops.
- To identify and solve key development constraints in existing commercial farm forestry industries.
(John some of these could be the basis for detailed objectives)

Implementation:

To stimulate the adoption of farm forestry by 25% of farmers in the >400 mm annual rainfall zone by the year 2003.

Detailed objectives (1 year horizon)

General:

- To obtain endorsement from the Corporate Executive for this Plan by September 1998.

Development:

Implementation:

- To appoint a farm forestry adviser to the Kojonup/Katanning district using Bushcare funding by September 1998.
- To develop a Communications Plan for the Unit by December 1998.
- To develop a Training Plan for the Unit by June 1999, covering the Unit's role in farm forestry training.
- To plan the incorporation of farm forestry into whole-farm plans for 2 properties in the maritime pine belt by June 1999.

Key strategies

Research and development

- Evaluate new tree crop species, production systems, products and markets.
- Identify and overcome specific impediments to better performance of existing tree crop and native forest industries.
- Develop and test farm-level integration of tree crops.
- Seek external funds to support tree crop development.
- Conduct market research to clarify the farm forestry needs of farmers.
- Focus resources into a few key projects to achieve a 'critical mass'.

Extension and training:

- Collate and package information on farm forestry into the TreeNote Series for the Farm Forestry Advisory Service (FFAS).
- Build the delivery side of FFAS, to cover general enquires on farm forestry with a low level of expertise, using faxback and REX as frontline tools.
- Use expert staff to respond to substantive public enquiries passed on from frontline contact.
- Establish whole-farm demonstration sites as focal points for community learning about farm forestry.
- Promote whole farm planning for the integration of farm forestry.
- Attend and conduct field days and seminars.
- Prepare and deliver farm forestry training at all levels (including professional service providers).

Liaison and services

- Liaise with business units and industry to identify R&D and information needs.
- Build networks with LCDs, industry, community groups.
- Liaise with AgWA for coordinated development of farm forestry.
- Participate in the delivery of services through focus and recovery catchments.
- Undertake farm forestry planning as a promotion or on a fee for service basis.
- Maintain clear demarcation between CALM's advisory and commercial activity to avoid any real conflict of interest.

Policy and administration

- Plan and control revenue and expenditure.
- Seek external funding that is complementary to the Unit's role and activity.
- Contribute to policy development.

Situation Analysis

External

Industry overview

Most farmers now recognize that land degradation is likely to become very much worse if remedial action is not taken. The Salinity Action Plan's estimate that 3 million ha of revegetation is required has been generally accepted. The concept that a commercial tree product incentive in revegetation (farm forestry) will be essential to achieving this goal is fast gaining recognition, especially amongst farmers. However, the concept still only receives lip service from state and commonwealth agricultural and landcare agencies and agricultural professionals. This is reflected in the small proportion (< 2%) of funds allocated to the Farm Forestry Program under the Natural Heritage Trust and the dismal progress by AgWA in developing any real commitment to farm forestry.

Rapid expansion of bluegum planting in the high rainfall area has been a powerful demonstration of the economic strength of tree crops. However, the preponderance of plantation planting has reinforced the traditional separation of forestry and agriculture when the landcare imperative calls for their integration.

The Maritime pine initiative is a major opportunity to develop farm forestry through public investment. This is neatly complemented by the oil mallee project which has been successful in demonstrating the potential for wheatbelt tree crops and in providing an alternative working model for how it can be done. However, the predominance of NHT funding for planning and non-commercial revegetation, at the expense of commercial farm forestry significantly reduces the momentum of tree crop development.

On balance there is an important and challenging job for a competent group to grasp.

Competitors

Most of the expertise, commitment and achievement in farm forestry in WA sits within CALM. Most private agricultural and forestry consultants do not yet have the necessary knowledge or expertise to advise farmers on farm forestry. AgWA concedes leadership in farm forestry industry development to CALM, but has ambitions to be prominent in extension where CALM is least well equipped with resources. The AgWA ambition does not sit comfortably within their organizational and professional ethos which is decidedly ambivalent about farm forestry.

AgWA is best dealt with as a partner rather than a competitor. CALM will readily retain leadership in the development of farm forestry but should share leadership in extension and adoption as foreshadowed in the State Salinity Plan. Likewise the private sector professions need to be seen as partners and the departure of public sector farm forestry professionals to go into agribusiness should be encouraged.

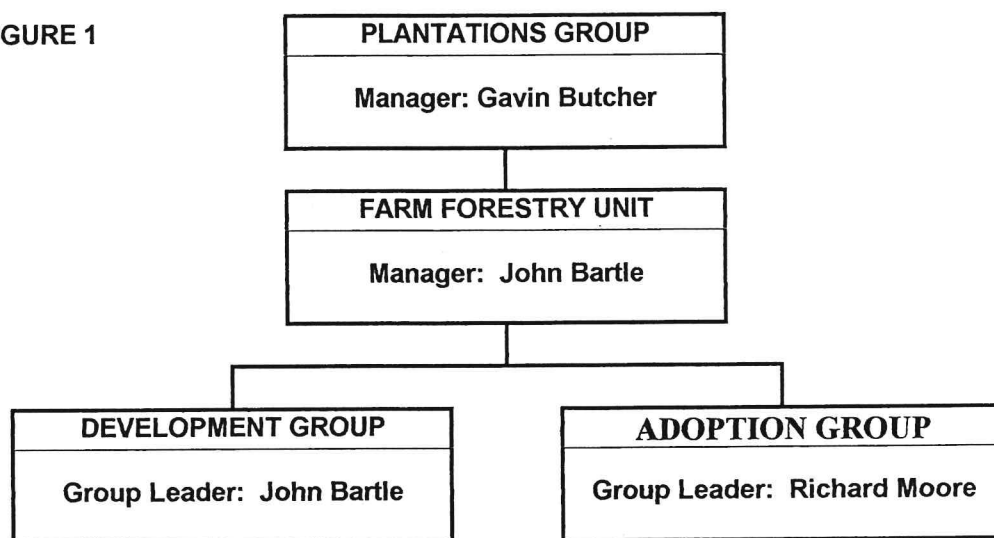
Linkages with other agencies and groups

There is a plethora of agencies and groups becoming involved in farm forestry. The main groups are landowners, agencies, agribusiness consultants, the timber industry and Regional Initiative Groups. The Farm Forestry Unit should pursue interaction with these groups to build networks, exert influence and secure additional external funding.

FARM FORESTRY UNIT STRUCTURE

The Farm Forestry Unit is one of four units within the Plantations Group. The Unit structure and staff allocation is shown in Fig 1.

FIGURE 1



STAFF

The Unit has 7 permanent and 4 full time contract staff (Table 1). Staff are widely dispersed and provide incomplete coverage of the southwest agricultural area.

TABLE 1. Farm Forestry Unit Staff

STAFF MEMBER	TENURE	LEVEL	SECTION	LOCATION
John Bartle	Permanent	L7/3	Manager	Como
Wally Edgecombe	Permanent	L5/4	Development Group	Como
Rick Giles	Permanent	L4/3	Development Group	Dwellingup
Gavin Wornes	Permanent	L3/3	Development Group	Esperance
Glenda Godfrey	Permanent	L1/7	Admin Assistant	Como
Richard Moore	Permanent	L6/4	Manager Adoption	Busselton
Bob Hingston	Permanent	L4/3	Adoption Group	Busselton
John Winchcombe	Contract	L3/3	Adoption Group	Busselton
Glenn Batty	Contract	L3/1	Adoption Group	Busselton
Mike Power	Contract	L3/2	Adoption Group	Albany
Volker Mischker	Contract		Adoption Group	Esperance

GEOGRAPHIC SPREAD OF FARM FORESTRY POTENTIAL

Farm forestry potential falls into four geographic provinces as follows:

West coastal belt: encompassing the west coastal plain from Jurien in the north to Busselton in the south. There is good potential for farm forestry expansion with *Pinus pinaster* from Perth to Jurien Bay eastwards to the Darling fault, an area of some 1 million hectares with severe wind erosion and salinity problems. Between Perth and Bunbury, where major eutrophication problems could be ameliorated, there is also potential for *Pinus pinaster* on some 150 000 ha of weathered dunal sands. From Bunbury south the tree cropping options increase to include *Pinus radiata*, bluegums and eucalypts for sawlogs. The southern half of this area is well served from the bases at Busselton and Como, but the northern half needs better coverage.

Darling plateau with annual rainfall greater than 500 mm: encompassing the area from Perth to Albany. There are important land, water and nature conservation gains to be made from farm forestry in this area. Commercial tree crops are *Pinus radiata*, *E. globulus*, eucalypts for sawlogs, and *Pinus pinaster* beyond the range for bluegums. Albany and Collie are emerging as foci within this area. Sections of the area are served by staff from Busselton and Albany but there are substantial gaps in coverage.

South coastal belt from Albany to Esperance: this long narrow coastal fringe with rainfall from 400 to 600 mm per year has high potential for *Pinus pinaster*, and some potential for bluegums and eucalypt sawlogs. It has severe wind and salinity problems for which tree planting solutions are urgently required. The eastern end of the area is well serviced from Esperance, the west from Albany but the middle is poorly covered.

Wheatbelt area: some 16 million hectares with no immediate farm forestry options but major farmland and environmental degradation problems urgently in need of tree crop solutions. The western fringe (greater than 450 mm rainfall) has good potential for *Pinus pinaster* and some potential for eucalypt sawlogs. Oil mallees are currently the only tree crop with an extensive prospect in this area. Narrogin is becoming the focus of wheatbelt farm forestry activity. The area is also serviced from Como and Esperance.

There are substantial gaps in coverage with existing staffing levels, particularly in Geraldton, northern west coast (Gingin), Pinjarra, Collie, Boyup Brook, Kojonup, Katanning and Esperance (when funds for Volker Mischker's position finish in July 1998). These gaps might be best filled by establishing local farm forestry consultants, at least partly financed from the revenues they generate, similar to what has been done in the oil mallee project.

Main sources of funding

Approximately 30% of the Unit's funding is from external sources, as shown below:

- Total CALM recurrent funding for 1997/98 = \$880 000
- Total external funds for 1997/98 = \$400 000

SWOT Analysis

This section is an analysis of current activities and resources of the Unit.

Strengths of the Unit and its Activities

- Sound foundation of experience and knowledge based on direct involvement in the R&D phase of farm forestry development during the 80s and early 90s
- Recognition by landowners that FFU staff have practical experience and know what we are talking about in the paddock.
- Strong links with other agencies, especially through Project Officers and Catchment Support people from Agriculture WA
- Recognition by other agencies and groups as having the practical “nuts and bolts” of farm forestry
- Emerging interest in farm forestry by innovative landowners

Weaknesses of the Unit and its Activities

- Inadequate resources to cover 400+ mm/year rainfall zone (gaps in coverage – see Map 1)
- Insufficient farm forestry advisors to stimulate activity on a district by district basis.
- Lack of coordination and fragmentation of effort by agencies and groups.
- Unwillingness of the forestry industry to accept the role of small independent growers in farm forestry.
- Lack of acceptance by agricultural professionals of the role of trees in farming systems.
- Apparent lack of interest or poor understanding by many landowners of the role of trees in overcoming land degradation and in improving production.

Opportunities for the Unit

- To establish CALM as a leader in stimulating the broad-scale adoption of farm forestry.
- To stimulate interest and activity across the diversity of landowners.
- To use the State Salinity Action Plan as a framework for agency and community cooperation
- To deliver information on farm forestry through Catchment Support Teams and landholder groups to target high priority catchments (eg. in Focus and Recovery Catchments)
- To integrate farm forestry with other CALM programs, such as Bushcare (?) and Western Shield, in farm and catchment planning
- To make use of the emerging Better Business program to deliver farm forestry
- To meet the interest by landowners in diversifying from traditional agriculture
- To enable landowners to evaluate farm forestry in their search for sustainable farming methods
- To link with Regional Initiatives; eg. Blackwood Initiative and the South Coast Regional Initiative
- To promote the growing demand for wood fibre as a commercial driver for farm forestry

- To recognise that a marketing infrastructure being developed by the expanding plantation industry will benefit small-scale growers.

Threats to the Unit (outside the Unit's control)

- Lack of resources going into farm forestry, especially in NHT.
- Inhibition of farm forestry potential by 'free money' from NHT programs
- Restrictive local government planning laws (eg. firebreak requirements)
- Lack of immediately available information on products and markets
- Uncertainty about markets for some wood products; eg. markets for young eucalypt sawlogs

Financial Plan