

POLICY STATEMENT NO. 13

COMMERCIAL FLORA HARVESTING

NOVEMBER 1993

1. BACKGROUND

Flora harvesting is a significant and expanding multi-million dollar industry. Prior to 1980, the Forests Department was responsible for flora management under the *Native Flora Protection Act 1935*. During this time all flora was considered to be forest produce under the Forests Act and commercial pickers were required to be licensed to pick on State forest, timber reserves and certain other Crown lands.

In 1980, the Acts repealing the Native Flora Protection Act and providing for flora conservation by amending the *Wildlife Conservation Act 1950* were proclaimed. The responsibility for control of flora harvesting, including seed, was transferred to the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, with its management applying to all lands, rather than only some Crown land.

Under the *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984*, CALM is responsible for the conservation and management of flora throughout Western Australia, and for administration of the *Wildlife Conservation Act 1950*. CALM thus has the authority to exert controls on the commercial harvesting of protecting flora in Western Australia on all lands.

A survey of the flora industry undertaken in 1980/81 showed that:

- exploitation of Western Australian native plants for cut flowers, seed and nurseries was worth \$1.5 million, \$0.7 million and at least \$3.0 million respectively at the wholesale level;
- 50 per cent of all cut flowers and 80 per cent of all seed were taken from Crown land;
- 588 species were used by the industry;
- *Boronia megastigma* was the most heavily exploited species and was the only species for which there were any data on the impact of picking;
- exploitation of the genera *Verticordia*, *Stirlingia*, *Agonis*, *Banksia* and *Dryandra* accounted for 52 per cent of all cut flowers harvested while the genera *Acacia*, *Kennedia*, *Eucalyptus* and *Helipterum* accounted for 61 per cent of the total weight of seed collected;
- most picking activity was concentrated around Perth and Mount Barker;
- almost all heavily exploited species have widespread distributions, but a few are geographically restricted and may require intensive research and management.

The estimated value of exports of cut wildflowers (both bush-picked and cultivated) and proteas in 1991 was about \$15.5 million (source: Australian Bureau of Statistics). No data are available on the value of seed. Western Australia is largely unique (only South Africa being at all comparable) in having a multi-million dollar industry based on harvesting of indigenous flora from the wild. The most recent estimate is that bush picking comprises approximately 35 per cent of the total wildflower and protea market, reflecting an export value of about \$5.5 million. The wildflower sector of the industry has a large export component, while seed is used mainly for revegetation projects within Western Australia.

Export of native flora is covered by the *Commonwealth Wildlife Protection (Regulation of Exports and Imports) Act 1982* administered by the Australian Nature Conservation Agency. In accordance with the requirements of that Act in relation to the export of native flora taken from the wild, CALM produces a management program for the commercial taking of Western Australian flora. The Commonwealth Act requires that the harvesting of native flora for export be undertaken under a management program approved by the Commonwealth Minister, and in a manner that is not detrimental to, or contributes to trade which is detrimental to, the survival of the species. This applies equally to Crown and private lands.

It was estimated in 1988 that the number of species being exploited had increased to about 1,500. There was also considerable growth in the number of Commercial Purposes Licences issued for the taking of flora for commercial purposes from Crown land, from 454 in 1980/81 to 1,333 in 1988/89. Following the twenty-fold increase in licence fees in June 1990 to \$100.00 for Commercial Purposes Licences, the number of these licences decreased to 576 in 1990/91 and 661 in 1991/92. The number of Commercial Producer's/Nurseryman's Licences, for the sale of protected flora taken from private land, declined from 199 in 1980/81 to 87 in 1988/89, before increasing to 284 in 1990/91 and 259 in 1991/92, despite the five-fold licence fee increase to \$25 in June 1990. This, along with export data, reflects a shift in emphasis from Crown land to private property in the industry.

Although the level of production from commercial plantings has increased dramatically, there are still many wildflower species (e.g. rushes) which are collected almost exclusively from Crown land, including CALM-managed lands. It is likely that this need will continue until economic propagation and cultivation techniques are developed. The pressure to develop techniques for commercial propagation of wildflowers is increasing while areas available for bush picking are reduced due to changes in vesting and purpose, and clearing.

Similarly, the majority of seed is collected from wild populations, although there has been a recent increase in planting of and production from seed orchards. In the case of seed collected for revegetation, the demand for seed will not be satisfied in the short term from seed orchards.

The Department's mission in relation to flora is one of conservation. There is nothing in legislation which specifically gives the Department the function of promoting, encouraging or developing the flora industry. Nevertheless, the Wildlife Conservation Act provides for flora to be commercially utilised.

CALM controls approved commercial harvesting of native flora in order that this resource is managed to ensure its long term conservation; a fair and equitable return is received by the State; wherever possible the operation is commercially viable; and the resource is managed to minimise waste.

Management problems have arisen as a result of inadequacies in the *Wildlife Conservation Act 1950*. Amendments are proposed to allow, for example, for the licensing of dealers and wholesalers, and the testing of licence applicants, and will improve CALM's management capability.

There is a need for further research on commercial flora harvesting in Western Australia, with emphasis on monitoring (i.e. distribution, abundance, recruitment, population structure) and management of the flora populations and their interaction with the activities of pickers (particularly harvesting practices, fire regimes, dieback). Such research will lead to the development of management strategies, and specific Wildlife Management Programs for individual species or groups of species.

Because of strong public awareness of indigenous flora and its harvesting, and the potential for adverse impacts to occur if the flora industry is not adequately managed, an active campaign to improve industry awareness and education is necessary.

This policy statement does not address issues relating to the Western Australian Government's sovereignty over the State's indigenous flora, derivatives from flora and intellectual property pertaining to flora and its derivatives, nor does it address the extension of sovereignty to flora taken from the wild which is subsequently further developed for uses such as horticulture (including patenting or varieties developed from wild flora) or the extraction of genetic material or compounds for pharmaceutical and other applications. Flowing from the State's sovereignty and property rights is the right of the State to share in and benefit from any natural product of flora or a product structurally based on any natural product of flora. These matters are the subject of policy and legislative consideration and will be reflected in Departmental policy statements in due course.

2. OBJECTIVE

To manage the commercial harvesting of protected flora on Crown land and private property to ensure that harvesting is undertaken in a manner that does not jeopardise the conservation of the species being harvested, nor, in the case of Crown land, the conservation values of the land.

3. POLICY

The Department will:

- 3.1 Provide for the development and operation of a flora industry in Western Australia in accordance with Government policy and the Wildlife Conservation Act.
- 3.2 Permit picking and seed collection under licence on State forest and Crown land other than nature reserves, national parks and conservation parks, subject to land use priorities, conservation needs and management conditions.
- 3.3 Licence the sale of protected flora derived from commercial picking and seed collection on private property.
- 3.4 Ensure that the taking of protected flora is in accordance with a management program approved under the *Commonwealth Wildlife Protection (Regulations of Exports and Imports) Act 1982*.
- 3.5 Maintain an effective administrative, licensing and monitoring system.
- 3.6 Ensure that the State receives a return for the flora resource which provides the capacity for undertaking the necessary research and management in relation to flora harvesting.
- 3.7 Implement management practices to conserve exploited protected flora and its habitat and to ensure its sustainable harvest.
- 3.8 Liaise with industry and related groups over the management of the flora industry.
- 3.9 Carry out, cause to be carried out, or promote research on exploited protected flora as necessary.

4. STRATEGIES

To accomplish the Department's objective and policy, the Department will implement the following strategies:

- 4.1 Licence operators in the industry as appropriate, to pick and sell protected flora, and subject to proposed amendments to the *Wildlife Conservation Act 1950*, licence processing and trade.
- 4.2 Prepare and implement a management program for the sustainable harvest of protected flora taken for export in consultation with the Australian Nature Conservation Agency.
- 4.3 Ensure that licensed operators are familiar with the species, conditions and endorsements applicable to their licences.
- 4.4 Subject licensed operators to appropriate controls including the keeping of records, provision of returns and compliance with conditions such as may be required by the Department.
- 4.5 Develop and maintain a computer system for the maintenance and retrieval of data and statistics on the flora industry.
- 4.6 Collect data on the distribution and commercial utilisation of species in commercial demand.
- 4.7 Train and maintain staff where protected flora is harvested to implement Departmental policy and strategies and enforce legislative requirements.
- 4.8 Maintain an active, ongoing program of industry education and awareness relating to flora conservation, using:
 - literature (e.g. brochures, posters, booklets, newsletters), videos and slide kits;
 - formal education and testing of licence applicants;
 - literature and signs at appropriate outlets (e.g. CALM offices, Shire and Police offices, information bays);
 - talks to industry groups (e.g. Wildflower Pickers and Producers Association, Flora Export Council of Australia);
 - displays at town and agricultural shows.
- 4.9 Develop and implement a system of licence fees, royalties or other mechanisms to ensure that there is a return to the State from flora taken from Crown land, and to ensure that the industry meets the costs of satisfying State and Commonwealth requirements (e.g. for ongoing monitoring and management).
- 4.10 Review licence fees and royalties annually.
- 4.11 Encourage commercial flora production on private property and the establishment and maintenance of private commercial seed orchards and nurseries, especially for species that are of limited supply or are difficult to harvest on a sustainable basis from Crown land.
- 4.12 Seek to ensure that access to sufficient seed is available to meet future revegetation needs, within conservation and management constraints.
- 4.13 Monitor distribution, levels of harvesting and impacts of exploitation on protected flora.

- 4.14 Ensure that a system of conservation reserves exists that adequately protects representative areas and species of exploited flora (the commercial harvesting of flora from areas formally approved by Government as future conservation reserves would normally not be permitted).
- 4.15 Undertake research on the distribution, reproductive biology, ecology and protection of exploited flora, and recommend the discontinuation of picking of species or populations in the wild where their conservation is under threat.
- 4.16 Develop Wildlife Management Programs and Interim Wildlife Management Guidelines for exploited plant taxa and appoint management teams for their implementation.
- 4.17 Endorse picking on CALM-managed lands, and lands over which CALM has management agreements in place, within sustainable levels for specific species and the maintenance of the conservation values of the area.
- 4.18 Implement *Phytophthora* dieback management procedures in accordance with the Western Australian Commercial Flora Harvesting Management Program. CALM Policy Statement No. 3 and the various standards and practices developed by the Department as appropriate to the flora industry.
- 4.19 Liaise with Commonwealth and State authorities, local government and other relevant authorities and groups on appropriate matters including research and monitoring, commercial utilisation, enforcement and joint strategies for public and industry information and education.
- 4.20 Maintain the Western Australia Flora Industry Advisory Committee to liaise with and receive advice from representatives of the flora industry and other relevant interests.

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR