

Collie tree bill before State Parliament

THE three millionth seedling in a project to improve water quality in the Wellington catchment will be planted this winter.

In a joint statement, Environment Minister Peter Foss and Resources Development Minister Colin Barnett said the \$30 million project combined both environmental and economic goals.

"The bluegum plantations being established by CALM are commercial crops that will create an additional source of income for landowners," Mr Barnett said.

"Plantation establishment and management will involve an investment of more than \$30 million over 20 years and a further expenditure of \$10 million per annum after year 10, when harvesting begins."

The project is being funded by Hansol Australia, a subsidiary of the major Korean forest products company, Hansol Forest Products. The wood fibre from the harvested trees will be exported to Korea to be made into paper.

Mr Foss said the company surveyed nearly a dozen other tree growing regions around the world before deciding to invest in Western Australia.

"Their choice illustrates the growing recognition by major international investors of the technical skills developed by

CALM in growing bluegums, as well as the exciting potential of the south-west region for fast growing, high quality pulpwood production.

"Hansol is committed to establishing 10 000 hectares of bluegums in the Collie region over the decade to 2003 and has appointed CALM as their managers."

A bill to ratify this agreement has now been introduced into State Parliament by Mr Barnett.

"The Collie Hardwood Plantation Agreement Bill has been drafted to give Hansol the necessary assurances for the long term development of bluegum plantations in the Collie region and the export of pulpwood," Mr Barnett said.

"The bill contains similar provisions to the Albany Hardwood Plantation Agreement Act of 1993, which covers the 20 000 hectare bluegum project underway in the Albany region.

"More than 1500 hectares of bluegums have already been established under the Hansol project, including 500 hectares planted in 1993 on SECWA land at Collie.

"Another 1000 hectares are expected to be planted on already cleared farmland this winter, bringing the total number of seedlings planted to more than three million.

"The majority of plantings will be undertaken in partnership with local landowners through CALM's sharefarming scheme."

Mr Foss said the project would deliver significant economic and environmental benefits to participating landowners and to the State as a whole. As well as boosting farm income, bluegums on already cleared farmland would provide substantial land care benefits by:

- improving crop and pastoral production by creating windbreaks and shelter belts;
- reducing soil erosion by controlling surface water runoff; and
- lowering ground water levels, in turn reducing surface salt contamination and salinity in streams.

The project would also play a significant role in reducing the high salinity levels in the Wellington catchment area and the Wellington Dam itself.

Mr Barnett said the plantations would bring economic advantages not only to landowners growing trees, but to the whole local economy.

"Jobs will be created through CALM's use of subcontractors to perform most of the operations. In this way, the majority of Hansol's investment will flow directly to the local community."



Checking the growth of eight-year-old bluegums is South Coast Sharefarms field manager Mark Giblett. Photo by Jiri Lochman

