

A vision for value



BVR Furniture's Les Brooker with CALM's Timber Marketing Manager Terry Jones and Environment Minister Peter Foss admire the distinctive grain in a marri table. To the right rear is a 'Welsh' dresser, also made from marri. Photo by Ross Swanborough

WESTERN Australia's timber industry is making big gains in value adding to native timbers through downstream processing.

Since the new long-term sawlog sales contracts with companies were signed early last year, the WA sawmilling industry is ahead of its obligations under the Forest Management Plan to add value to at least 50 per cent of the jarrah sawlog resource by 1997. The industry's value adding average is more than 51 per cent for jarrah sawlogs.

The gains made with jarrah are being recognised by the market and the value-add-

ing techniques are now being applied to other native timbers, such as karri and marri.

Research by CALM in consultation with two local furniture manufacturers has achieved remarkable results in using karri and marri to produce a range of furniture products that may have world-wide appeal.

This not only will increase the value of our native hardwoods, it will replace timbers that currently are imported and create more jobs in the timber processing industries.

It also will give the furniture industry greater choice and flexibility in using native hardwoods which until now have been used

mainly in the construction, or wood pulp industry.

Environment Minister Peter Foss recently unveiled a range of furniture produced from karri and marri by BVR Furniture of O'Connor and Jensen Jarrah of Busselton. The timber was dried by CALM's Wood Utilisation Research Centre at Harvey.

The furniture included dining room tables and chairs, coffee tables, 'Welsh' dressers and outdoor settings.

"Karri has long been renowned as a great structural timber because of its high strength, but difficulties with seasoning, machining and gluing has meant the manufactur-

ing industry has largely overlooked it as a timber for fine furniture and other uses," Mr Foss said.

"Marri has good strength and finishing properties, but because it is a bloodwood with extensive gum veins and imperfections, it has not gained wide acceptance among furniture manufacturers. This is despite the fact some of these imperfections add character to the beautiful golden tones of the timber.

"However, a CALM team led by Dr Graeme Siemon at the Wood Utilisation Research Centre now is overcoming these problems.

"The work has involved investigating the conditions needed to kiln dry the various timber dimensions used by the industry, the adhesives that will provide strong, long-lasting glue joints, and the dressing, sanding and finishing techniques for the dried timber."

CALM is now establishing a special karri and marri network. The network is being coordinated by CALM's timber utilisation marketing manager Terry Jones and will include people involved in the timber and furniture industry who want to develop strategic market opportunities for karri and marri.

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CALM Executive Director Dr Syd Shea said that a great deal of co-operative effort between CALM and BVR Furniture had gone into the production of kiln-dried marri for furniture timber.

"Three years ago, BVR Furniture began scouring the South West in search of select grade marri for furniture, and in the process created a network of millers prepared to saw marri," Dr Shea said.

"Until then, they had manufactured furniture from jarrah and imported oaks and ash.

"By developing a green, sawn marri supply, they took what was widely regarded as largely unusable timber and value added their skills and expertise,

to produce fine quality marri furniture that caters to the middle and upper end of the market.

"Marri is a light-coloured hardwood that takes stain particularly well, which enhances its ability to compete favourably with the American and Tasmanian oaks.

"Discoloured and gum-veined, feature-grade marri also compares well with Baltic and knotty pine, as a character timber for furniture, cupboard doors and panelling.

"Perhaps the most gratifying outcome is that CALM continues to play a vital role in BVR's successful use of a local timber to produce a top quality product, while creating employment for local people."

