

WA leads in tree planting

A RECORD 27.4 million tree seedlings are being produced at CALM's nurseries in Manjimup and Narrogin for planting out this winter on farms and in native forests.

Environment Minister Cheryl Edwardes said the record number reflected the increasing interest in tree crops among Western Australian farmers who were now leading the nation in the rate of expansion in area under tree crops.

"The rate of increase in plantings in Western Australia is now three times the national average," she said.

"This has seen the tree crops estate increase from around 130,000 hectares four years ago to more than 212,000 ha today.

"It is expected that a further 25,000 to 30,000 ha of cleared farmland will be planted with tree crops this winter."

CALM's Plant Propagation Centre at Manjimup will produce 26 million seedlings including 12 million Tasmanian bluegums, 6 million maritime pines, 2 million radiata pines, 4.5 million karri and 1.5 million mixed species.

The Narrogin nursery will produce 1.4 million seedlings, of which around 700,000 are oil mallees for use in the lower rainfall areas of the wheatbelt.

Mrs Edwardes said the first stage of an \$8 million expansion at the Manjimup nursery was due to be completed this year. This would increase seedling production to 35 million next year.

"When the overall development is completed in about three years, total seedling production will be around 55 million a year, she said.

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Children from Kosovo help Environment Minister Cheryl Edwardes plant a tree as part of the Arbor Day '99 celebrations (see page 3). Photo by Craig Stewart

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"The expansion is part of the State Government's Salinity Action Plan to establish 150,000 ha of maritime pines on cleared farmland over the next 10 years.

"This will be the forerunner to a longer term aim of at least 500,000 ha of maritime pines in the 400 to 600 mm rainfall zone.

"As well, a further 50,000 ha will be revegetated with native species to help restore the natural biological diversity of the region."

Mrs Edwardes said tree crops on farms were an integral part of the drive to combat land and stream salinity by lowering water tables.

"On-farm tree crops, particularly maritime pines, also create the base resource for a range of regionally-based downstream processing and manufacturing enterprises for products such as laminated beams and other

structural timbers," she said.

"Plantation management and harvesting, and downstream processing will be a major boost to regional employment and diversifying regional economies.

"The pines will become increasingly important in ensuring a supply of structural timber as the construction industry moves away from native hardwoods in line with the Regional Forest Agreement strategy to use native timbers in high value end products."

Tree crops were also among the spearheads of the nation's commitment to meeting greenhouse gas emission targets under the Kyoto protocols.

"CALM research indicates that in the South West, from Geraldton to Esperance, there are approximately 3 million ha of cleared land that could be used for tree crops, with a further 8.5

million ha in the pastoral region that could be regenerated with native species," Mrs Edwardes said.

"Over the next 30 years, tree crops and native vegetation rehabilitation could lock up more than 200 million tonnes of carbon and have an impact on reducing the global warming potential of greenhouse gasses.

"Commercial end uses for tree crops, as well as the potential for international trading in carbon credits, will also make on-farm tree crops increasingly attractive to landowners.

"CALM has begun a pilot scheme with BP Australia to study the potential of on-farm tree crops as carbon sinks.

The increasing domestic and international demand for wood fibre means the cost of sequestering carbon will be offset by the return from timber products."

