INFORMATION SHEET 20

CONSERVING THE INLAND WOODLAND

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Woodlands have played an important part in the State's development, together with agriculture, mining and water supply. Man has taken his domestic agriculture, mainly sheep, inland with him. Gold was discovered in the Yilgarn goldfields near Southern Cross in 1887 and water was pumped through 565 km of pipeline, from Mundaring Weir to Kalgoorlie, initially in January 1903. Before converting to oil power for the pumping stations, 30 million tonnes of fuel and mining timber were cut from some 4 million hectares of inland woodlands of *Eucalyptus* and *Acacia* (mulga) species.

Renewed activities in the eastern goldfields, which followed the discovery of nickel and increases in gold prices, have placed a new impact and higher values on the native flora and fauna. People appreciate the beauty of the flora and its value in preventing soil erosion, yet the most beautiful places and the best fodder plants are often the worst treated, either by littering or by overgrazing. Found nowhere else in the world, more than 1 100 of the 6 500 plant species of Western Australia can be categorised as inland species. Clearly seen when travelling inland are the recurring patterns of plant association, soil and landscape. Six broad types of association are:

1. The mulga (*Acacia* species) thickets, from north of Kalgoorlie to the Hamersley Ranges, receiving less than 250 mm annual rainfall. These cover a greater part of Australia than any other association.
2. The *Eucalyptus* woodlands on gentle ridges and broad valley flats (Plate 2)—250-500 mm rainfall.
3. The residual sandplain heath and wildflower scrub.
4. The *Eucalyptus* mallee shrublands on granitic soils.
5. The granitic rock-pavement plant communities.
6. Saltbush communities (Plate 1) on saline clay soils of depressions, salt lakes and the Nullarbor Plain.

Plate 1. Saltbush and eucalypt regeneration.

These are fragile ecotypes which mis-management can turn into dust bowls. Such results have been caused in the past by a combination of drought and overgrazing, and can easily happen again unless there is better management practice.

Management should aim at repair and maintenance of adequate vegetation, control of erosion and salinity, and very close control of watering points and of the vegetation near to them.

Vegetation around mining areas and settlements must be kept as intact as possible, especially on hill tops, steep slopes and wherever rare or unusual ecotypes are involved.

Spoil from engineering and mining activity should be returned to a comparable contour and land use by the people should be zoned in accordance with conservation principles.

Above all the character of the landscape and its ecosystems should be preserved as far as possible, since their retention is of national importance. Management should ensure that examples of natural species are preserved for posterity.

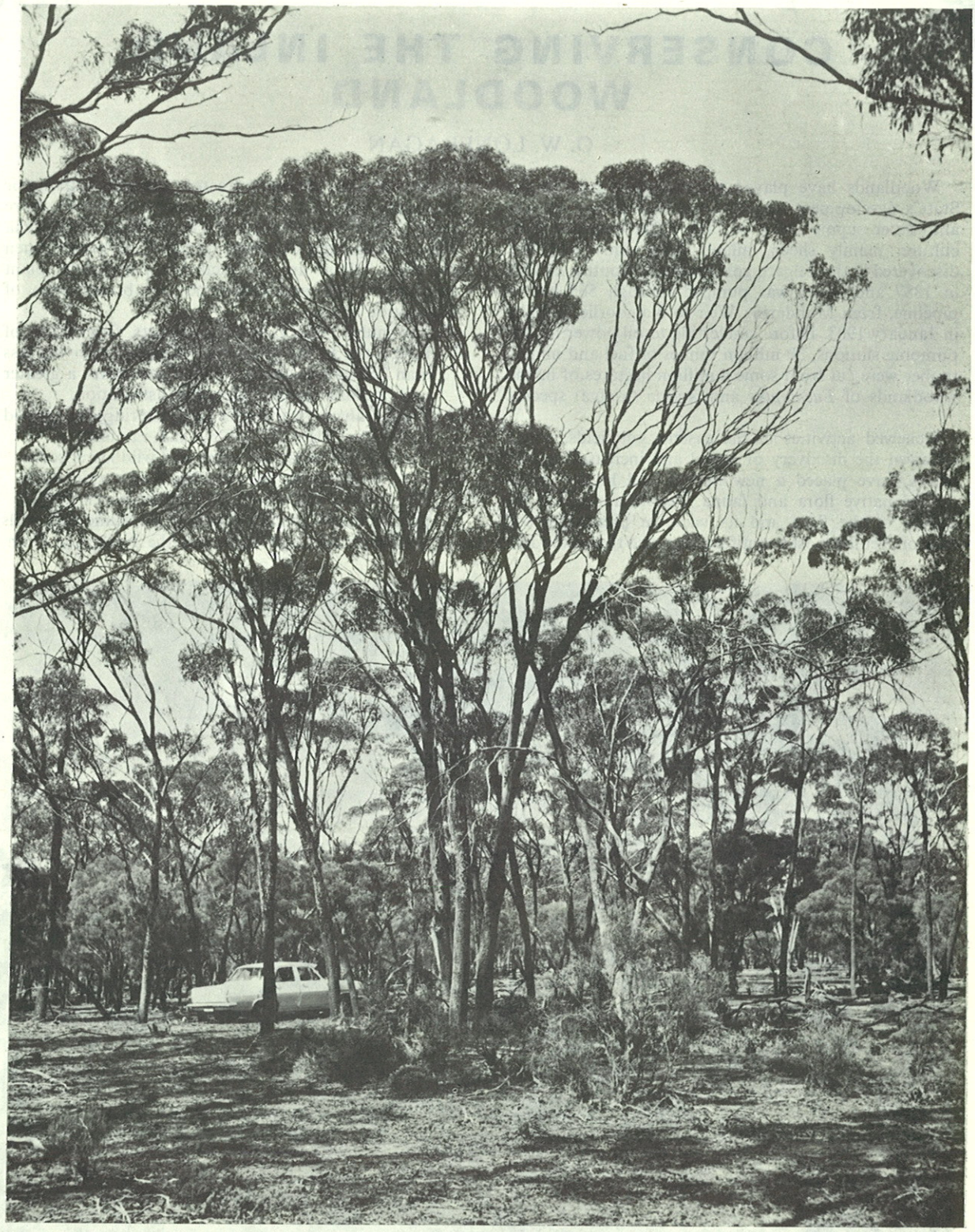

Plate 2. Dundus blackbutt (*Eucalyptus dundasii*)—typical inland eucalypts on flat and undulating country.