

## ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF BIODIVERSITY

### MARRI - THE FORGOTTEN TIMBER

by Graeme Siemon

**M**ARRI or red gum is one of the most widely distributed native eucalypts in the south-west of Western Australia. It grows from Greenough to east of Albany, and inland beyond Narrogin, and the form can vary from shrubby to a 60 m tall forest tree. The large seed capsules make the species easy to identify, and these are commonly referred to as 'honkey nuts'.

The botanical name of marri is now *Corymbia calophylla*, because the bloodwood group of the eucalypts were reclassified into this new genus in 1995. The term bloodwood refers to the ability of these species to produce gum (kino) as a response to wounding. The three main causes are insects, fire or mechanical damage. This characteristic has disadvantaged marri considerably where timber production is concerned, because it has been difficult to produce wood with no kino veins.

*Marri, one of the most important trees for wildlife in the wetter south-west, also has value for timber production.*

Marri timber is an attractive honey-brown colour, with density averaging about 850 kg/m<sup>3</sup>, and straight-grained defect-free timber is about twenty-five percent stronger than similar jarrah timber. It was often used for structural purposes, provided the kino veins did not reduce the strength.

The most common use for marri in the last twenty years has been as woodchips for pulp and paper production, because it provides the main component of the marri/karri mix which is exported to Japan.



Dining table and chairs made of marri - BVR Furniture.

Forest thinnings or residue logs which are below sawlog quality are used, as well as sawmill residues. A further advantage of this use is that previous logging of jarrah or karri had tended to favour the regeneration of marri, which is an excellent coloniser, and an imbalance was developing in the native forests.

Marri also has considerable potential as an appearance grade timber for furniture and joinery. The timber is easily worked, and the greatest problem is the extensive characteristic flaws which affect the quality, particularly the kino veins.

CALM's policy is to promote value-adding of native timbers, which generally involves drying the timber, and then dressing (i.e. machining) and grading. Drying marri timber may take longer than required for jarrah, depending on where the tree was growing. In general, timber from open-grown marri trees on farms is lower density and dries faster. CALM Timber Technology at Harvey has a 30m<sup>3</sup> solar-assisted kiln dedicated to drying marri timber for furniture.

With previous Australian and Industry Standard specifications, very little marri timber could make grade because of its characteristics.

However, a 'feature-grade' is now being developed which emphasises the natural features or characteristics of timber. A much greater quantity of marri can be used when extensive kino veins and other features are accepted. Previously there were regular problems when customers insisted on clear wood, because this is only a percentage of the overall timber produced.

BVR Furniture are a small company in Perth who have specialised in feature grade furniture, and produce high quality pieces using either marri or jarrah feature grade timber.

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*Want to know more about revegetation with local native trees for timber?*

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