

MEMBER'S PAGE

THE FIRST HARVEST - OIL MALLEES ON 'SUN VALLEY'

ONE paddock on our property, 'Sun Valley' at Beacon, has a sloping area of poor, gravelly soil that was hardly worth while cropping. Once it would have carried a natural stand of mallees, so we decided to put in a trial of oil mallees. 25,000 seedlings of *Eucalyptus plenissima* were planted in 1998, on the contour, in single lines at 10 metre spacings. The area between the rows was left to revert to native grasses, everlastings and shrubs. By 2002, after one very wet and two very dry years, the mallees were ready for harvesting. The average height was less than a metre, but they were bushy, ideal for oil production.

Kalannie Distillers arrived with the equipment in July. First, a forage harvester cut the plants, then the bin of chopped leaf and stem material was steam distilled. It was exciting to see the pale golden oil begin to collect! This plantation produced 600 litres of high quality oil. As yet, it is not certain what will happen to the organic residue.

We were horrified at the appearance of the plants after the forage harvester had gone through -

surely they would never recover? But, despite being in the second year of one of the worst droughts on record, by October it is clear that the mallees are regenerating well. If this rate of growth continues we should be able to harvest every two years. At the moment the financial returns are not very great, but they

do exist, and every little bit helps. In addition the area is developing into a very attractive wildflower and bush bird corner, as well, of course, as helping to control groundwater. We are pleased with this trial, and are considering whether we might set up other areas.

Peta and Gerry Kirby



Harvesting



Distilling



The oil



After harvest in July.



Regrowth, October.