

## ECONOMIC VALUE OF BIODIVERSITY

# GROWERS WORKING TOGETHER TO DEVELOP THE SANDALWOOD INDUSTRY

Tim Emmott and Geoff Woodall

Given the scale of the perennial revegetation required to address natural resource management issues, commercial drivers for revegetation are required, particularly on private land with a high opportunity cost. It is critical that new profitable industries based on perennial systems are developed and become part of normal land management practice.

The developing Sandalwood industry can enhance the likelihood of WA land managers looking beyond annual crops to systems that will provide both long term income and natural resource protection.

In WA, revegetation for landcare benefits alone has been "hard to sell" particularly in low rainfall areas (less than 500mm). Areas that are revegetated for landcare benefit alone are usually those with a very low opportunity cost, where the profitability of traditional agricultural systems is marginal.

Productive agricultural land within locally or regionally strategic conservation areas (ie productive soils located between high value remnants) are rarely revegetated with biodiverse mixes of locally native plants because "they do not pay their way".

Recent experience in the development of sandalwood plantations in the South Coast and Avon regions has shown that landholders are however prepared to revegetate productive areas with commercial native plant species that are capable of generating real revenue at some future stage.

There is the potential to establish approximately 50,000 ha of biodiverse sandalwood plantations in the Western Australian wheatbelt. An industry of this size will



Beverley farmer and ASN member Patt Butterworth inspecting seed ripening in a direct seeded, biodiverse sandalwood plantation near Narrogin.

have major outcomes for broader NRM issues. For example, there is concerted effort in the South Coast region to re-establish a native vegetation link between two of the state's most biodiverse National Parks (the Stirling Range National Park and the Fitzgerald National Park). This approach can be repeated state wide with biodiverse commercial sandalwood plantations.

The revegetation of 50,000 hectares with biodiverse sandalwood plantations would have broader NRM implications for the protection and enhancement of biodiversity assets, groundwater recharge and for the protection of land and water assets.

The re-establishment of sandalwood within the wheatbelt of WA may have broader fauna conservation benefits. The nuts of sandalwood trees are an important food source for various animals including the Bush Rat (*Rattus*

*fuscipes*) and the restricted woylie (*Bettongia pencillata*). These animals also require a dense understorey and the establishment of biodiverse sandalwood revegetation can provide both habitat and food.

### Development of the Avon Sandalwood Network

In the Avon region, a grower driven sandalwood group has formed, called the Avon Sandalwood Network Inc (ASN). The aim of the ASN has been to increase the quality and quantity of information available to growers and investors, enable growers to come together to share experiences and work together to further develop this industry. The ASN now has 65 members, consisting of growers, researchers, industry and NRM practitioners.

Since its development in 2003, the ASN has produced three newsletters, and held four workshops and field trips throughout the wheatbelt, with the most recent event held in Narrogin in March 2005, attended

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by 58 people. At the inaugural AGM held in September 2004, an enthusiastic executive committee was elected, and a membership fee of \$50 per annum was introduced.

At present the ASN has been focusing mainly on agronomic, licensing and wood marketing issues. Future focus areas for the ASN may include the development of sandalwood nut markets, as there will be increasing amounts of

plantation grown sandalwood nuts available in coming years.

The ASN has been successful due to the enthusiasm of our members and executive committee and our funding support.

The ASN will be holding its AGM and spring workshop / field trip in September 2005. For more information, contact the Avon Sandalwood Network secretary Tim Emmott from Greening

Australia (WA) on (08) 9621 2400 or [temmott@gawa.org.au](mailto:temmott@gawa.org.au)

*Tim Emmott works for Greening Australia (WA) in Northam and Geoff Woodall for the Centre of Excellence in Natural Resource Management in Albany ((08) 9892 8532).*