

MORE PLANT NAME CHANGES ON THE WAY?

Recent papers suggest that the genus *Melaleuca* should be enlarged to include a number of other genera, including *Beaufortia*, *Callistemon*, *Calothamnus*, *Conothamnus*, *Eremaea*, *Lamarchea*, *Petraeomyrtus*, *Phymatocarpus* and *Regelia*. This would make *Melaleuca* a very large genus.

The rationale for the proposed change comes from detailed studies indicating that *Melaleuca* as we currently recognize it is not a distinct and evolutionarily unified genus. Rather, some species of *Melaleuca* are more closely related to species

in these other genera than they are to other species of *Melaleuca*. To put it another way, all the genera listed above are simply specialised offshoots of *Melaleuca*. Each has distinctive features but in an evolutionary sense all are simple adaptations from *Melaleuca*.

Interestingly, there has never really been a good defining feature that unites all species of the traditional *Melaleuca* – rather, it comprises a hotchpotch of species left behind after the distinctive ones were removed into their own genera! The photos below show how variable

the current *Melaleuca* is. At present, the WA Herbarium has not made a decision about whether to adopt these changes, as studies published so far are somewhat preliminary.

A more detailed study is expected within the next couple of years, at which point all the herbaria in Australia will confer as to the best option for dealing with the problem. In the meantime, all species retain their traditional names, for the time being at least.

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These two melaleucas, *M. eleutherostachya*, Yenyening, and *M. steedmannii*, Three Springs, do, at first glance, seem to be quite different. Currently there are 215 named species of *Melaleuca* in WA.



These seven genera would add a total of 81 species into *Melaleuca*.

Above L-R:
Conothamnus aurea, Esperance;
Kunzea ericifolia, Darlington;
Eremaea violaceae, Eneabba;
 Left L-R: *Calothamnus brevifolia*, Bruce Rock;
Callistemon glaucus, Albany;
Phymatocarpus maxwellii, Esperance;
Beaufortia macrostemon, Toodyay.
 Photos: Penny Hussey