

Plantations play a vital role in mitigating land degradation and salinity and contribute to a reduction in carbon in the atmosphere.



E n v i r o n m e n t a l S e r v i c e s



The Commission has worked with the Conservation Commission and the Department of Conservation and Land Management throughout the year to develop the new Forest Management Plan for release as a draft in August 2002. The plan is the blueprint for native forest and plantation management for the next 10 years and includes the quota of timber available for harvesting each year.

The Commission is also actively taking up the increasing opportunities to work in partnership with both private and public sector businesses and organisations to support tree planting.

The Commonwealth Government is potentially a major partner and during the year the Commission has been part of the State negotiating team to develop possibilities for Commonwealth funding to plant more trees. Particular emphasis has been placed on opportunities that would be eligible for funding from Commonwealth grant schemes including the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality, the Natural Heritage Trust (Part 2) and the Greenhouse Gas Abatement Program.

The Commission has therefore taken a strategic approach to developing plantations and farm forestry in the South-West and is identifying and establishing plantations in areas close to regional centres that would also attract new industries.

The focus has also involved planting a broader range of tree species, matching the different types of trees to the diverse conditions. A range of eucalypts and sandalwood, as well as pine trees, was established in plantations during the year.

Potential benefits from the new plantations include the development of new regional industries based on the supply of timber. The trees also provide environmental benefits including carbon sequestration and help to control the groundwater table with associated effects on salinity, biodiversity and land degradation. They also provide broader land management benefits such as countering wind erosion, providing shelter for livestock and adding to the appeal of the land.

Environmental Management Standard

The Commission was independently audited in July 2001 and certified as having environmental management systems (EMS) that meet the international standard ISO14001.

The standard ensures that environmental management is systematic and thorough.

Having an effective EMS in place provides benefits including:

- protection of the environment;
- conservation of natural resources;
- an equal competitive basis between companies in relation to environmental investment;
- demonstrated compliance with regulations;
- reduced costs from inefficient procedures and corrections;
- improved community relations;
- improved customer trust/satisfaction;
- improved senior management attention; and
- an ability to be environmentally proactive rather than reactive.



Commission Plant Propagation Centre grows a wide range of species for the establishment of plantations, farm forestry and forest regeneration.

Battling salinity

The Commission continued its work - independently and with BP - to establish maritime pine (*Pinus pinaster*) and other species on cleared farmland in the Katanning and Mount Barker region - areas threatened by salinity caused by rising groundwater tables. The BP project, in partnership with landowners, is believed to be the first tree-planting program in Australia with the twin goals of correcting land degradation problems and offsetting carbon emissions.

BP became involved in the project in 1999 and originally planned to establish 300 hectares of plantation each year until 2010. The company increased this figure to 350 hectares in 2001 and has set a higher target again for the 2002 planting season. The acquisition of land for the planting season is well underway.

Meeting the silviculture challenge

Silviculture - the regeneration, growing and tending of trees - is one of the key functions of the Forest Products Commission. Natural regeneration, supplemented by an appropriate planting regime, is the primary outcome of the Commission's silvicultural program in all previously harvested forest areas.

During the year the Commission:

- Completed regeneration on 1340 hectares of harvested karri forest and prepared 1250 hectares of harvested karri forest for regeneration.
- Treated for regeneration 8120 hectares of previously harvested jarrah forest, non-commercially thinned 1740 hectares of forest (including 710 hectares achieved through the jarrah forest enhancement program involving displaced timber workers.

Forest Management Plan

The Commission has worked with the Conservation Commission and the Department of Conservation and Land Management throughout the year to develop the new Forest Management Plan for release as a draft in August 2002. The plan is the blueprint for native forest and plantation management for the next 10 years and includes the amount of timber available for harvesting each year. A draft of the plan is due to be released early in the new financial year.

The reduced level of harvesting in native forests will result in a significantly reduced native forest-based industry with a strong focus on increased manufacturing into value added products such as outdoor and indoor furniture, flooring and joinery.

The Commission will work with industry to make the best use of the resource that is made available.

Implementation of the Regional Forest Agreement

The Commission is responsible for implementation of four of the commitments made under the Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) between the Western Australian and Federal Governments signed in May 1999.

The following have been completed:

- development of a Memorandum of Understanding for a Forest Industry Structural Adjustment Program; and
- review of timber harvesting documents with a view to improve understanding by field operators and field staff.

Substantial progress has been made on the following:

- legislative review and competitive neutrality review in relation to wood-based businesses; and
- pre-logging fauna assessment.

Murdoch studies woylie link

Following an approach by the Commission's Arid Forest Branch in November 2001, Murdoch University is now undertaking a funded research project into the relationship between native marsupials and the distribution of sandalwood seed.

The 12-month study commenced in January and is examining the caching behaviour of the woylie (pictured opposite). The study will focus on the relationship between the marsupial and sandalwood with the aim of determining the role woylies have in the dispersal and recruitment of the important tree species.

Information from the study will build on the knowledge and silvicultural practices used by the Commission.

Nursery innovation

The Commission's 226-hectare nursery at Manjimup is the base for commercial production and sale of tree seedlings, the sale and deployment of native and genetically improved seed, and the research and development of tree species for commercial production.

During the year the Plant Propagation Centre, which is based at the Manjimup nursery, developed eucalypt hybrid cuttings that will provide greater profit when established in plantations on marginally saline lands, greater survival and growth in drier climates and disease resistance.

The hybrids, which could be dispersed among regular seedlings in plantations, are mainly used for sawlog production. The wastage is suitable for pulpwood.

Tree seedling production at the nursery has been reduced by 50 percent as a result of a drop in demand for tree seedlings - primarily due to cutbacks in plantings of blue gums. Production is expected to drop from a peak of 35 million in the late 1990s, to about 18 million in 2002.

The nursery is pursuing a diversification of opportunities to respond to this drop, and be well placed to service an increase in activity from new tree-farm developments in mid to low rainfall zones.

Feral goat management

A pilot program that could have a dramatic impact on managing feral goats was started in the North-East Goldfields in May.

The Commission is working with a pastoralist and the Department of Agriculture to develop better grazing control processes that will also reduce the impact of feral goats grazing on sandalwood trees and allow greater regeneration of the trees.

The Commission is funding the establishment of trap yards on the property, which will contain the goats within certain areas, reducing the costs of mustering stock and improving livestock management.

The Year Ahead

In the year ahead the Commission plans to:

- *Contribute to a final agreement with the Commonwealth Government for new investment in the battle against salinity, through the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality, and the Natural Heritage Trust.*
- *Offer plantation developments, both through the Greenhouse Gas Abatement Statement Program and individually, to corporate investors to assist in removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, while also combating rising water tables and providing regional development in timber growing and processing.*
- *Develop regional reforestation plans with Regional NRM (Natural Resource Management) groups to address the environmental needs of each area by matching them with prospective plantation developments and industries, which also have the capacity to deliver economic and social benefits.*
- *Develop the hardwood sawlog program in catchment headwaters.*
- *Develop harvesting plans for removal of pines from Gnangara, taking into account the protection of wetlands and cave systems and Perth's water needs.*



Commission Manjimup Nursery overseer Yvonne Nicol (left) and nursery worker Wendy Dudley tending to seedlings.