



## **BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT BRANCH**

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# Media Release

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## **First Indian sandalwood plantations established in Carnarvon**

The Forest Products Commission (FPC) has established the first large scale Indian tropical sandalwood plantation trials in the Carnarvon area, with the aim of giving communities and pastoralists in the Gascoyne possible access to a valuable new tree species.

State Forestry Minister Kim Chance told a symposium of Asian sandalwood buyers in Perth today that if the plantations were successful, they would add a new dimension to land crop diversification in the region.

“Indian sandalwood produces significantly more oil and is more valuable than the native Western Australian species we currently supply to overseas markets,” the Minister said.

Mr Chance said there was a shortage of Indian sandalwood worldwide, largely because of unsustainable harvesting over a long period of time in many parts of Asia. As a result, prices offered for the species had increased sharply in recent years.

“Although it is early days, FPC foresters and scientists are confident they can successfully grow Indian sandalwood in the Carnarvon area, by employing proper planting regimes and maintenance systems. This is based on 20 years of research trials on the species in Kununurra,” the Minister said.

Western Australia is the world’s leading supplier of sandalwood, a fragrant timber that has long been used as incense in religious ceremonies in India and most other Asian countries, providing about 40 per cent of global sales.

“All of our sandalwood supplies currently come from stands of the Western Australian species which grow wild, mainly in the pastoral regions of the State’s Goldfields,” the Minister said.

“Indian sandalwood would add a valuable new string to our bow.”

Mr Chance said the new plantations were located on Crown Land and had been established with the involvement of the Department of Agriculture and neighbouring pastoralists.

He said FPC would continue its work at the Frank Wise Institute in Kununurra

“The tropical sandalwood plantings already there are the oldest in Australia, and as a result, they can provide a wide genetic base of trees. This is needed as insurance – as a fall-back measure in case a disease hits the species.

“It also provides an opportunity to determine what commercial gains can be made through tree breeding and cloning,” Mr Chance said.

The Minister said researchers at Kununurra were carrying out a series of oil assessments on the older trees, with the best oil-producing trees to be cloned for further use by the industry.

“If Indian sandalwood is to survive as a species, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that Western Australia will be crucial to its survival,” Mr Chance said.