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Media release

Technology boost for tropical sandalwood

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The tropical sandalwood industry may soon be able to use clone technology to ensure the best possible yields of sandalwood oil, thanks to scientific trials by the Forest Products Commission (FPC) and Nippon Paper Industries Co Ltd (NPI).

Dr Liz Barbour from the FPC said the new technology offers the potential to ensure every tropical sandalwood tree planted will consistently produce the best oil.

“The new technology is a step closer and has been made possible through a partnership between NPI and the FPC,” Dr Barbour said. “The FPC has the elite oil producing trees and NPI has the tissue culture laboratory and know-how.”

NPI’s patented tissue culture and rooting system will allow elite oil producing trees to be replicated to meet the demand of the expanding tropical sandalwood industry based in northern Australia.

The first products from this project travelled from Collie, in the South West, to Kununurra for planting in the FPC trials in May 2008.

The project was initiated by the FPC following the results of a joint research project with the University of Western Australia which showed that different trees within the same plantation produce different amounts of oil, with some trees producing no oil.

NPI has been trialling the patented tissue culture and rooting technology, called the phototrophic culture system, with forestry plants at its laboratory in Collie since 2000. Through an expression of interest FPC identified this laboratory as having the best skills in Western Australia to meet the challenge of cloning tropical sandalwood. Elite plant material taken from the FPC’s 16 year-old trial plots was delivered to Collie last year for sterilisation and development of propagation protocols.

Pic captions:

<Clonal_Sandalwood_plugs.JPG> New technology has the potential to deliver tropical sandalwood plantations with consistently higher oil yields.

<watering_in_seedlings.jpg> Hannah Hetz waters in new sandalwood seedlings at the FPC’s Kununurra research site.

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