



## Summary

**\$155,000 project:** 13 farming families were able to protect 350 hectares of fragile Wodjil soils using 111,880 seedlings and 85 kilograms of locally collected native host seed. As part of this funding, training sessions and workshops were also held and information resources developed.

**Location:** The Shire of Mt Marshall, is situated in the North Eastern Wheatbelt with two major centres - Bencubbin and Beacon. The Shire borders onto the Shires of Trayning, Koorda, Mukinbudin, Yalgoo, Dalwallinu, Westonia, Yilgarn, Wyalkatchem, Sandstone and Menzies.

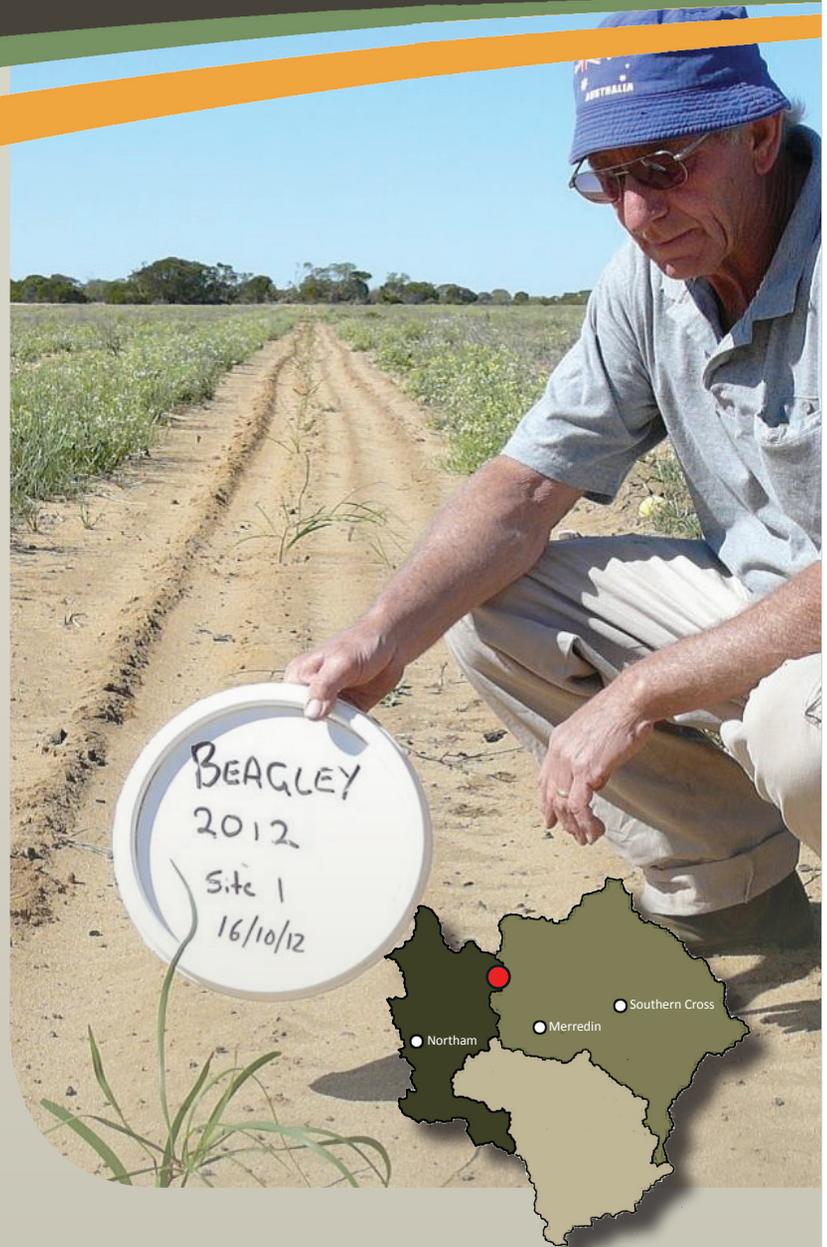
The Mt Marshall Sandalwood Project includes neighbouring shires and communities.

**Annual Rainfall:** Approximately 330 mm.

**Soil types:** There are a wide range of soil types in the region, however, the Mt Marshall Sandalwood Project has a focused on establishing biodiverse Sandalwood systems on Wodjil soils which are marginally productive for agriculture.

## Background

The Shire of Mt Marshall officially became known as the Sandalwood Shire in February 2007. At the time of their centenary the Shire published a book on the history of the area. Local farmer, Bob Huxley, noted that according to this book the best Sandalwood grew on Wodjil soils in the district. As with a large part of the Western Australian wheatbelt, the majority of the landscape had been cleared for broadacre



agriculture. Over time the Wodjil soils in the North-Eastern Wheatbelt have proven problematic for these conventional farming systems due to their acidic nature and fragility.

When Bob read about the history he thought, 'We have plenty of Wodjil in this area and its mostly not used for growing crops, it blows away and acts as recharge areas. Maybe we should be putting these areas back into Sandalwood.'

And so began the journey. Bob gathered as much information as he could, actively encouraging others to plant Sandalwood and helped them source grants, many through Wheatbelt NRM funding rounds. Over time, biodiverse Sandalwood systems were popping up all around Mt Marshall and surrounding regions



thanks to the support from Bob and other leaders in the field such as Tim Emmott (formerly of Greening Australia) and researcher Dr Geoff Woodall. Bob convinced many farmers over the subsequent years that Sandalwood could fit into their farming system, slowly building up a group of conventional farmers who could see what a Sandalwood industry could bring back to their region.

Field days and site visits illustrated to the community how well the biodiverse Sandalwood system was establishing and growing on land that previously struggled to grow a crop. 'Biodiverse plantings are all well and good', said one local farmer, 'but then I still have an unproductive paddock. It's the sandalwood that will give me production and an income in the future.'

In April 2011 a Wheatbelt NRM funded Master Tree Grower Program toured to the Mt Marshall area looking at biodiverse Sandalwood systems. Graeme McConnell of PlanFarm presented an economics spreadsheet which demonstrated the cost/benefit of sandalwood systems as compared to current practices. Wendy Dymond of ThinkScape facilitated the workshop. By the end of the workshop the local farmers had developed their vision, to plant 50,000 hectares of unprofitable Wodjil soils to biodiverse Sandalwood systems over the next 20 years.

The group of farmers then formed the Mt Marshall Sandalwood project steering committee under the

auspices of the Australian Sandalwood Network (ASN) and approached Wheatbelt NRM for support. Wheatbelt NRM has since provided support for the project as one of their regional priority projects.

Later in 2011, Mt Marshall Sandalwood (MMS), through the ASN, were successful in obtaining funding from Wheatbelt NRM under their Round 5 Regional Flagship Soil Conservation Incentive Program (SCIP) funding round. The project was granted \$155,000 to:

- Officially launch the project on Friday September 9th 2011, by the Hon Mia Davies, MLC, Member for the Agricultural Region.
- Two further community workshops were held on Thursday and Friday September 8th and 9th modelled on the original April Master Tree Grower workshop. The result of these follow-up workshops were pledges of support from the Department of Agriculture and Food WA and Wescorp (the major exporter of Sandalwood in Western Australia). Several locals agreed to give talks at local schools, to hold women's events to inspire others in the community and broaden the support base for the 50,000 hectare project.
- A technical workshop was held in Bencubbin on March 2nd 2012 focusing on establishment of sandalwood systems.

Wheatbelt NRM's SCIP program aimed to fund the establishment of 100 hectares of biodiverse



sandalwood systems, however, 350 hectares was established, consisting of 111,880 seedlings and 85 kg of locally collected Sandalwood host seed. The seed was sown using the latest direct seeding techniques. This was made possible by a greater in-kind contribution from the farmers participating in the project and also by further funding provided by Wheatbelt NRM (\$17,000).

## Site preparation inspection

Extending project information to the community, farmers and other stakeholders has been an important part of this project. Signage, a webpage, two newsletters, media releases and information sheets were also developed as part of the project.

Direct seeding mix: 95% MAP and vermiculite with 5% native seed mix (45 species).

13 farming families benefited from this funding over the two years of the project. Here is what a few of them had to say: Mark and Michelle Fitzpatrick 'What makes it attractive is the mentoring from Bob and Ros'. 'We first got interested when we went to a sandalwood field day at Hogan's farm in 2010 and saw how well the site was doing in that drought year. We fenced off a 30 ha site where we had unsuccessfully tried to grow wheat and could not graze as it would just blow away. In 2011 we received our first 8,000 host seedlings through a Wheatbelt NRM SCIP project. In 2012 we received assistance to

plant another 6 ha through this funding round, which we used to connect up existing vegetation which provided valuable shelter. We used a combination of Bob's direct seeding mix and seedlings'.

'The whole family was involved. We crawled under the old Sandalwood trees on our property with the kids and collected the nuts, then Bob and Ros showed us how to prepare them'.

'If the government can provide the funding for the seedlings, we are happy to do the rest. We did the weed, insect and vermin control as well as erecting the fencing' (Mark Fitzpatrick).

'I like the fact that they are natural, part of our heritage. This project is about bringing back the livelihood that started Mt Marshall. The government granting us the trees allows us to take the area back to a sustainable and natural state' (Michelle Fitzpatrick).

Peter Sasche 'We're able to add value to worthless land'.

'I hate seeing bare soil so by establishing this Sandalwood planting we get the environmental benefits of stopping the paddocks from blowing away. We have started planting sandalwood on our poorer country where we are not getting the returns we were 10 years ago'.

'I could not have spent that much time doing the whole project on my own so it was great that Bob could come in and do some of the work. I covered

half the costs, did the fencing and all the spraying, but without Bob it just would not have happened. He has the knowledge, the machinery and the experience. He is the real driver here'.

'Without the funding we could not have done it' Stuart Clare. 'We are at a fork in the road, farming will not disappear but forestry can play a big part in farms becoming more sustainable.'

'I have doubts about how long conventional farming will last so I am diversifying our farming practices and sandalwood will be part of our future farming system. Trees, especially sandalwood, will be another form of income for us. We need different trees for different jobs in the landscape'.

'If we had a processing plant in the area it would produce jobs for the younger generation. The whole industry could be providing jobs; planting, harvesting, weed control contracts, processing etc.'

'I like to think outside the box, do different things that other people may not think about'

Gerald Sasche 'I see sandalwood as an insurance against climate change. More summer rain suits the trees.'

'It was an easy decision to put in trees because of our salinity problem. If I can solve it with a commercial option that's a win'.



## For more information go to:

[www.mtmarshallsandalwood.org.au](http://www.mtmarshallsandalwood.org.au)

[www.wheatbeltnrm.org.au](http://www.wheatbeltnrm.org.au)



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