

Casuarina obesa: A commercial revegetation species for salinised land

The Casuarina Obesa Working Group (CoWG) formed in 2004 to foster the development of Swamp Sheoak (*Casuarina obesa*) as a saltland tree crop for commercial natural resource management (NRM) outcomes. CoWG is a sub-committee of Timber 2020 and is supported primarily by the Great Southern Development Commission, based in Albany, W.A. Membership includes farmer/growers, nursery proprietors, Forest Products Commission, Dept of Agriculture, Great Southern Plantations, Green Skills, University of WA Centre of Excellence in NRM (CENRM), South East Forest Foundation, CSIRO and the Tammar Noongar Community.

The South Coast Regional Initiative Planning Team (SCRIPT), the regional NRM Agency, has included the project into the Regional Investment Plan for 2005/06, which will strengthen project partnerships and engage Ben Boxshall of CENRM to further develop a research strategy for the species. CoWG is investigating marketing opportunities for the species.

Swamp sheoak is a native to WA growing on the margins of salt creeks, rivers and lakes. It tolerates salinity, waterlogging and frost and is widely used in land conservation revegetation programs throughout the wheatbelt. Swamp sheoak fixes nitrogen and will quickly colonise bare ground if stock is excluded.

A report prepared for the Green Skills' project "Investigating Potential Bush Products In the Great Southern" concluded that Swamp Sheoak has considerable potential as a commercial revegetation species for saltland.

CoWG has designed a matrix that provides a 'map' for the commercial development of the species. Six key areas have been identified:

- genetic development,
- silviculture research
- promotion, extension and demonstration,
- wood product testing,
- market research; and
- economic analysis.

Green Skills recently employed consultants to complete a survey of 23 Swamp Sheoak stands on 15 farms in the region from Wagin to Mt Barker. Important conclusions arising from the survey were that trees of straight form can be grown using superior seed lots and pruning, trees will self-seed and colonise bare ground protected from stock, and pasture will re-establish over time as the trees ameliorate the site.

CoWG member, Bill Hollingworth has recently won a Churchill Fellowship to study casuarinas in China, India, Spain and Egypt.

More information

Contact the CoWG facilitator Julia Levinson, on 08-9892 8520 for more information.



Photo: The *Casuarina obesa* working group in Bill Hollingworth's stand that has recently been thinned for posts.