

mallee research from the point of view of genetic development, biomass production and the development of possible end markets. But the State's cultivated mallee population was growing and the FFI CRC realised the urgent need to find a way to economically harvest the native trees.

"In a sense we want to reward the farmers, who have invested in oil mallees for their environmental commitment, with additional options for economic returns," Mark said.

"The benefit of a body like the CRC driving this project is that we can work with the Commonwealth and State Governments, as well as industry partners to solve the oil mallee harvesting challenge.

"It's about industry, government, scientists and engineers working together."

Team effort pays off

As a result of industry and government collaboration the WA State Government recently put \$1.5 million towards the oil mallee harvester project. The funding is through the Government's Low Emission Energy Development (LEED) initiative and is dependent on the CRC attracting private sector funding.

"The money will be used for the design, fabrication, commissioning and field testing of a new prototype harvester," Mark said.

"The necessary private sector funds could come from people looking to invest in an exciting new industry, as well as those with a vested interest such as potential processors, end users and even farmers."

A phase one (P1) prototype of the harvester is planned to be ready for a field trial in Narrogin during December 2009. By December 2010, designs and specifications for the final harvester, P2, are expected to be ready for commercialisation.

"By the end of the project, the FFI CRC aims to have an operational harvester capable of reliably harvesting mallee trees at a high rate," Mark said.

"The most efficient rate of production is anticipated to exceed 50t per hour. However, the rate will be determined after further systems analysis has been carried out including an analysis of the nature of the chipped biomass.

"The final outcome will be a machine that can be commercially viable for a harvest contractor – perhaps an operator already engaged in the harvesting of similar crops." ↴

More information

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ABOVE: A visiting delegation at Verve Energy's Narrogin Integrated Wood Processing Plant during 2005 to see the trial processing of harvested oil mallees.

WA moves forward with industry development plan

Another positive sign the oil mallee industry development is maturing was the announcement by the Western Australian Government of the Oil Mallee Industry Plan in November.

Announced by the new WA Forestry Minister, Terry Redman, the Industry Development Plan (IDP) provides an outline of WA Government's favoured strategy to launch the industry's expansion into the State's emerging carbon and renewable energy markets.

In the plan, FFI CRC is acknowledged as a leading stakeholder and makes specific reference to the CRC's responsibility in overseeing the design and commercialisation of an oil mallee harvester – viewed as a critical milestone.

Central to the IDP is the identification of the roles the WA Forestry Commission, other government agencies, the private sector, research institutions, natural resource management groups, industry bodies, landholders and rural communities will play

in the development of the industry. The importance of the need to develop and locate specific industries best suited to regional biophysical characteristics and available infrastructure is also emphasised.

It is anticipated the WA Oil Mallee Industry will continue to gain momentum through the current interest shown by resource and energy-intensive industries in planting tree crops to offset carbon emissions.

The IDP is a joint project between the WA Forest Commission and the Oil Mallee Industry of WA with funding from the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality. The 106-page strategy can be downloaded from the WA Forestry Products Commission website: www.fpc.wa.gov.au ↴

More information

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