



MEDIA RELEASE – Monday 3rd November, 2014

Reversing the tree change

Esperance farmers would have thought their pioneering days of clearing the land were over.

But they are currently faced with the prospect of having to remove more than 50,000 hectares of blue gum forestry in the coming years.

The land in question has been purchased by local farmers following the sell off by Elders' which resulted in Integrated Tree Cropping breaking its lease last year.

The reality is that the blue gums will either be harvested or bulldozed to convert the landscape back to cropping or pasture.

However past research conducted by DAFWA's Dr Robert Sudmeyer indicated that in the initial years of tree crop removal, the land is particularly prone to soil and land degradation issues.

Based on this research the removal of blue gum plantations will more than likely leave farmers with paddocks which will be at risk environmentally.

This includes loss of soil structure and biology from the removal process; wind and water erosion due to "depressed crop and pasture productivity"; and nutrient leeching of applied fertilizer with possible impacts on water ways.

To assist farmers convert from blue gums, SEPWA will document other farmer's experiences and methods they have adopted to return their land to sustainable and productive agricultural land.

The project "Blue Gum reality – ensuring sustainable conversion of forestry land to crop and pasture", has received \$40,000 of funding through South Coast NRM.

The project which commenced in August will run for twelve months and it will ensure that other land conversions in the future are performed in an economical and environmentally sustainable manner.

Three sites, within the region, will be monitored to help farmers better understand the soil health challenges of reverting land use from forestry.

Soil samples and ground cover will also be monitored to assess the impacts of various farmers' conversion methods.

To date, two farms have been soil sampled and assessed for ground cover, one at Condingup and another at Coomalbidup.

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These two farms contain different soil types and have used different removal methods, which will assist in providing a wide variety of results.

The experiences of farmers in the south west region, who have already harvested trees and reverted land back to crop and pasture, will also be drawn on to help guide farmers.

All of the information gathered will be presented in an electronic format to help farmers better understand the implications of land use conversion and assist them to make an informed decision as to best way to approach it.

Photo caption – Farmers are now clearing bluegum plantations to convert the land back to pasture and cropping.

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