



AVONGRO

Wheatbelt Tree Cropping

The Avon River Basin

Key Regional Issues

Investment and Research & Development There is a need for further investment and R&D to ensure prospective large scale tree cropping options suited to the Avon River Basin become a commercial reality (e.g. Mallee Industry, prospective species identified in the SEARCH project). AVONGRO needs to be able to ensure that the groups / industries / agencies involved in the development of these prospective tree crops are adequately resourced to speed up the commercialisation to ensure broad scale adoption.

Salinity Salinisation of soils and water resources are of major concern in the ARB. Extensive clearing of deep-rooted native vegetation and the replacement of these with shallow rooted annual crops has caused a massive hydrological imbalance with rising ground water tables bringing salts to the surface and evaporation causing these to accumulate in the soil surface. Currently 5.3% of agricultural land is severely affected by salinity. This is predicted to increase to more than 27% if the issue is not addressed. While trees on their own will not sufficiently reverse this trend in rising ground water tables, when placed strategically in the landscape in conjunction with other methods, for example surface water harvesting, they have potential to play a major role in halting the spread of salinity.

Loss of biodiversity Extensive clearing for agriculture has left the ARB with less than 13% of its original natural vegetation and these remaining areas are largely degraded, isolated patches. The remnant nature of this vegetation does not support traditional forestry. Farm forestry provides the opportunity to link this fragmented landscape using belts of productive tree crop species.

Water quality With the increase of salinity, potable water resources are increasingly at risk. In other areas of Western Australia, already this trend has been reversed in water catchments by the inclusion of woody perennials in conjunction with other landscape treatments.

Erosion Erosion occurs through both wind and water. Tree crops can provide a valuable asset in terms of controlling wind erosion. Water erosion can be controlled by installing surface water harvesting systems which are often combined with trees.

Declining population The ARB has a population of 46,000 people, however currently there is a trend to a declining and ageing population in the broad acre agricultural areas. Young people are often reluctant to return to the region as farming becomes more risky, employment opportunities are limited and their peer base declines. Tree crops have the potential to provide new opportunities for young people and new immigrants to the State to relocate to the region. Employment opportunities in the tree cropping industry could include: site investigation, farm and whole of catchment planning, site preparation, seed collection, growing and planting seedlings, after care, stand maintenance, marketing, cooperatives, harvesting, value-adding, transport and others.