



MEDIA RELEASE

2009 WA Forester of the Year (05/11/2009)

The IFA WA Division announces with pleasure that it has recognised John Bartle for the 2009 Forester of the Year Award.

Mr Bartle is one of the great visionaries of Western Australian forestry. His impact on both forestry and agriculture in this state has been profound.

John Bartle is a graduate in Agricultural Science from the University of WA, and a former district officer with the Dept of Agriculture. In 1975 he took up a position in forestry research with the former Forests Dept at Dwellingup. In this job he pioneered the modern approach to rehabilitation of bauxite mines in the jarrah forest. This work drew his attention to critical issues surrounding forest hydrology and the salinity problem in WA.

John was one of the first scientists to recognise that the fundamental problem constraining the use of trees to ameliorate environmental problems on farms was not a scientific problem, but an economic and social one. The trees must generate a commercial return to cover the cost of their establishment and management - otherwise land owners will not plant them. John's research revealed that the most promising tree species for southwest areas was the Tasmanian blue gum. This tree would grow rapidly, lower water tables, but best of all, the timber was very valuable as pulpwood for the manufacture of high quality paper. This seminal research led directly to the development of the export woodchip market based on plantation timber. Today blue gum plantations are found on former farmland all over southern Australia. The plantations have profoundly improved water quality on many catchments, and the industry is worth multi-millions of dollars.

In the mid-1990s, John turned his attention to dry land forestry. This led to the development of a second great development: oil mallee plantations in WA and NSW. The oil mallee industry is still in its embryo stage, but its potential for carbon capture and biofuels is immense. With the expanding international interest in the use of biomass for electric power generation rather than fossil fuels, it is likely that the mallee industry will become as big and as profitable as the export woodchip industry – another instance of WA providing forestry and agricultural leadership.

In addition to his research, John Bartle has been notable for his encouragement of a generation of young foresters, who he instils with his infectious enthusiasm. Over a fence or a kitchen table, he has also inspired many a farmer or land owner to take up forestry, both for the good of the farm and the bank balance.

The IFA congratulates John Bartle on his professional research and leadership over the years. Few other people around the world could say that their work has led to the planting of so many millions of trees, and to the development of a wide scale commercially successful industry.

For Further information please contact:

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