

# The Institute of Foresters of Australia

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## Forest rust demands clean-up

The Chairman of the WA Division of the Institute of Foresters of Australia, David Wettenhall has called upon the States and Commonwealth to be much more pro-active in preventing myrtle rust from establishing in the country.

A Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry media release dated 4<sup>th</sup> May 2010 says myrtle rust has been detected in New South Wales. Myrtle rust is closely related to eucalyptus rust and has the potential to infect the Myrtaceae family of plants which includes Agonis (WA peppermint), tea trees, paperbarks and bottlebrushes.

Eucalyptus rust is considered to be one of the most serious threats to Australia's natural ecosystems including eucalypt production forests. The Office of the Chief Plant Protection Officer advocated activities to prevent the rust from entering Australia including industry bio-security and response planning and public awareness. Early detection before the rust enters Australia's forests was agreed by technical experts to be the best way to maximise the chances of eradicating the disease should it enter Australia. (Office of the Chief Plant Protection Officer, 2005).

In response to the current incursion there has been very limited public notice. DAFF and the WA Department of Agriculture and Food have put out statements but there is very limited awareness and action.

**This is a major bio-security incursion and the consequences to our native flora and plant industries are potentially enormous** – and in relative terms much greater than the potential impact of equine influenza on the equine industries, to which there was a much more active response. The rust has the potential to severely damage our forests, including our conservation reserves.

While there are uncertainties to some aspects of the rust incursion, as interim measures we must immediately take every possible action to eradicate and contain the rust. This should include limits on the movement of susceptible plant material and public information on the response so that the chances of detection are increased.

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