
MEDIA RELEASE

Bio energy is a key to a truly sustainable future in the regions

The Oil Mallee Association of Australia (OMA) has elected prominent Narrogin identity Lex Hardie as its new President. Mr Hardie, who is continuing his business interests in Perth after farming at Narrogin for over 45 years will bring to the role his experience in rural affairs and new industry development. A prominent member of the Narrogin sporting and farming community Mr Hardie was inaugural Chairman of the Narrogin Landcare group and also held the highest office as President for the WISALTS Group, WA Marron Growers Association and the regional Upper Great Southern Oil Mallee Association.

The OMA under Mr Hardies' stewardship has determined that it will maintain a strong focus on regional bioenergy development and will continue its advocacy for a bioenergy project in Narrogin.

Mr Hardie said, "I am concerned that bioenergy does not receive the attention it is due as a sustainable energy source as it has considerable external benefits such as broad environmental services and community benefits. To date the investment of considerable resources by the State Government, combined with the continuing efforts of the Oil Mallee growers has established a foundation for these new industries to flourish and meet WA's renewable and diversified base load energy provision."

He said, "Furthermore, farmers in the Northern Agricultural Region, who set the pace with initial plantings of oil mallees are continuing to perfect the production of eucalyptus oil, further research biochar and developing an ideal model for carbon which fits the CPRS and brings the maximum benefits to farmers."

"There is little doubt that in the future distributed energy production secured from short rotation tree cropping will complement the large scale base load generation which characterises the current electricity production at present." Mr Hardie said. "We believe that oil mallees grown for bioenergy provide a very good contributor to the energy mix and can also provide many valuable bi products such as eucalyptus oil and biochar." He added that "the OMA is pleased that the challenge of cost effective harvesting mallees has been embraced by the Cooperative Research Centre and we look forward to the launch of the new prototype harvester in Narrogin on 13th April.

The AGM, held in Narrogin was followed by presentations from;

- Simon Dawkins, the General Manager of the Oil Mallee Association, talking about the influence of carbon policy on the industry;
- John Bartle from the Department of Environment and Conservation and long time oil mallee researcher, reflecting on research needs;
- Dr Amir Abadi an economist from the Future Farm Industries Cooperative Research Centre based at UWA, outlining the comparative economics of farming and farming plus energy tree cropping, and;
- Don Harrison from Verve Energy who spoke about the potential future of bioenergy particularly when the value of local and regional benefits are considered.

Mr Hardie also paid tribute to the outgoing President, Mike Kerkmans, who has agreed to stay on the Management Committee. “Mike has been a champion of oil mallees for many years and last year was awarded the State Individual Landcare Award for his efforts to address environmental issues on his farms through landcare practices”, Mr Hardie said. “He was also recently selected to attend a gathering in Canberra for the Climate Champions Program. Mike has successfully brought community and government attention to the oil mallee industry and remains a key player in the Northern Agricultural Region.”

Go to the following link to read about Mike and Climate Kelpie.

<http://www.climatekelpie.com.au/ask-a-champion/farmer-case-studies/mike-kerkmans>

Mr Dawkins said, “We are pleased that the OMA has access to expertise across all stages of the mallee industry (nurseries, farmers and technical expertise) and this is reflected in the composition of Committee of management itself.”

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