



Hon. Brian Ellis MLC

Chair

Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs

C/- Parliament House

Harvest Terrace

PERTH WA 6000

Dear Sir

RE: INQUIRY INTO THE SANDALWOOD INDUSTRY IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Our family farms 8000ha close to the state barrier fence on the western edge of the Great Western Woodlands (GWW). We have a strong connection to the GWW over three generations and have been concerned for many years by the impact sandalwood extraction is having on a number of environmentally and culturally sensitive areas.

That the sandalwood industry has had a long and important role in W.A.'s history is without question. Much of the wheatbelt was pioneered by early settlers following the tracks and water holes that the sandalwooders had put in place many years before.

A review of the regulation and management of the industry is long overdue. The assumption of environmental sustainability has been questioned by many for some time. The environmental expectations of the broader community are not being met, and the attitudes and management practises of the Forest Products Commission compound this.

I would like to put forward the following observations and suggestions;

- The GWW is becoming an internationally recognised entity. Much of this is unallocated crown land, not pastoral rangeland, and is therefore still relatively undisturbed and biologically diverse.
- I would suggest restricting wild sandalwood extraction to pastoral leases. These have been degraded by grazing and feral animals over a long period.
- The number of visitors to the GWW has exploded in recent years. The visitors have an expectation of experiencing an undisturbed environment.
- These visitors have a value to the communities in the region. That value is probably greater than the value of the sandalwood industry and can be managed more sustainably.
- Places such as Cave Hill and Burra Rock in the GWW attract thousands of 4WD visitors every year. They come to experience the natural beauty and unique history of the area. Visitors do not expect to see front end loaders knocking over vegetation, or wheel ruts and cleared tracks proliferating over large areas. It is not a good look. Very 19th century.
- Undisturbed woodland is increasingly seen as having a value in its own right.
- The illegal pulling of wild sandalwood is of grave concern.

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- People such as ourselves do not have access to information about who can remove sandalwood. We don't know if we are seeing legal or illegal activity.
- DEC does not have enough people on the ground to monitor sandalwood harvesting adequately.
- Our local DEC people (Central Wheatbelt) cover an area from north of Dallwallinu to the Dundas/Kondinin Shire boundary. This area includes a large section of the GWW and hundreds of reserves in farmland. They also have to deal with many other issues relating to feral animals and plants in farm areas and clearing applications, but have only two staff able to deal with illegal sandalwood.

Summary

- Sandalwood to be harvested from pastoral leases, with those directly involved responsible for the sustainability of the industry, and also to be its beneficiaries.
- More resources given to DEC to deal with the increasing problem of the illegal removal of sandalwood.
- More recognition and protection for the Great Western Woodlands. It is the world's largest remaining intact temperate woodlands.

In conclusion, I feel that it is not in the best interests of the environment and the people of Western Australia for the continued removal of sandalwood in unallocated crown land in the Great Western Woodland.

Thank you for allowing me to comment.



Rolf Meeking

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