



Brushwood in the Moore Catchment

Brushwood Industry development on saline land

By Moore Catchment Council

'The planting of brushwood has helped to mitigate the increase of salt into the surrounding paddocks and further downstream by sucking up excess groundwater. Angela and Roger Dring, Bunjil'



Brushwood plantations at Bunjil

The Brushwood projects occurred over a span of three years, 2006—2009. The brushwood was planted under the project entitled 'The Brushwood Industry Development on Saline Land'. This project was funded by the Australian Government through NACC and included a offer to subsidise the purchase of brushwood seedlings to encourage farmers to diversify their farms production. The project focused on land that was under risk of increasing salinity in a medium to low rainfall area stretching from Calingiri to Morawa. The project was undertaken by 30 farmers throughout the project region. The brushwood species planted were *Melaleuca atroviridis*, *Melaleuca hamata* and *Melaleuca uncinanta*. Much of the brushwood in the area has been grown on ground that was unable to the cropped for reasons of conservation and biodiversity, water erosion, and salinity control.

The Brushwood Market

During the years that the brushwood project was being rolled out, the brush wood for fencing industry was promising to become a lucrative industry. The Brushwood market has primarily been driven in WA by Bowman Brush, a plantation, manufacturer and fencing wholesaler. Bowman Brush were originally based in South Australia, however moved to WA once they acquired a brushwood plantation out of Meckering in 2012. This development in the WA industry has seen two farmers from the MCC brushwood project harvest and sell a brushwood crop. Bowman Brush will buy cut, weighed, and bundled brushwood for \$0.50 per kilo of fresh weight (2017 price)



Ian McGillivray hand cutting a brushwood plant with a machete

Harvesting the brushwood is done by hand with a machete. This method is preferred to get the best looking brushwood for the fencing panels and can be done quickly and safely if practiced. Once cut the brushwood is then placed on a cradle, tied up and the green weight is measured to report for payment. These bundles are preferred to be 25—30 Kilos for manual handling purposes.



Brett Bowman at the Bowman Brush factory inspecting a near complete panel being made. Finished brushwood panels below



Project Participant Summary: Angela and Roger Dring, Bunjil

The area planted to Brushwood on the Dring's property was a part of a salty creek. The area was bare prior to planting and the purpose of the project for them was to get something to grow that could withstand the salt.

The reason for planting the trees here was to stop the increase of salinity into the adjoining arable paddock and also to mitigate some of the water erosion that occurs through the area after a heavy rain. Although the possibility of harvesting and selling made the project even more attractive this did not play a huge role in the decision to grow the Brushwood.

Roger and Angela planted the seedlings themselves using the local tree planter. The survival rate of the brushwood was approximately 70%, with the majority of losses on the sandier and saltier ground.



What worked: The planting of brushwood has helped to mitigate the increase of salt into the surrounding paddocks and further downstream by sucking up excess groundwater. This has also help minimise the amount of water erosion downstream by slowing the water flow after a heavy rain. The brushwood plantation has also helped invite native animals back to the area of the farm and has improved the landscape aesthetically.

What didn't work and what would you do differently: Due to the impact of the salt the plants are not growing as quickly they were first expected to when the project was rolled out. It was said to be approximately seven years of growth till being large enough to harvest, however ten years on and the plants are not quite at the required height. Another disappointment is that the brushwood fencing industry has not yet become as big as it was first said to become. This, along with the labour intensive harvesting method of cutting with a machete, makes the use the brushwood as a side industry unfeasible. However harvesting for the Dring's has never been their top priority or reason to plant the brushwood.

Overall Trial Conclusions

All farmers who have been involved in the brushwood project were satisfied with outcomes.

Brushwood was primarily planted to reduce waterlogging and the increase of salinity at the majority of the sites. The attraction of selling brushwood as a cash crop was secondary.

Only two farmers have harvested and sold the brushwood into the fencing market. The remaining farmers have been happy with the landcare outcomes of planting the brushwood and have only been moderately disappointed with the lack of market opportunities.

Recommendations:

- If you currently grow brushwood on your property and are interested in harvesting in the future contact Bowman Brush.
- Don't grow Brushwood expecting a quick growing cash crop, you will need to invest approximately 10 years to grow it, particularly if growing on marginal land.
- Contact Bowman Brush or any other brushwood fencing company before planting your brushwood to ensure you are planting the correct variety in the correct way.



For more information about the brushwood trials view [The Moore Review Project](#) or contact the Moore Catchment Council on (08) 9653 1355 or moorecc@bigpond.com.

For more information on the brushwood fencing product contact Brett or Hayley Bowman at Bowman Brush on 0458251261 or 0427763793, or visit the website www.bowmanbrush.com.