

TREES GROW COMMUNITIES



Local worker defends Blue Gum Industry



“Plantation timber provides an attractive income stream for farmers and farming communities” says Dane Carozzi.

The Federal Government is reviewing tax laws, which might impact on the plantation timber industry, an important source of income in the Great Southern and a positive influence on the environment.

One hundred and eighty years ago, Albany was briefly part of New South Wales. It has continued to attract eastern staters ever since.

One recent blow-in from the east is Dane Carozzi, here on a 12-month intra-company exchange from Victoria.

Dane works for Timbercorp – one of Australia’s largest and best-known plantation timber managers.

Timbercorp is a managed investment company. It has some 30,000 ha of blue gum plantations in WA and exports wood chips from Albany and Bunbury. Blue gum chips have a high pulping yield and good fibre properties. They are exported to Japan for making quality printing and writing paper.

Dane studied forestry at Melbourne University, and after graduating and a spell with Gunns in the Apple Isle, he moved to Hamilton in Victoria as a tree farm supervisor with Timbercorp.

Hamilton is the heartland of merino wool and the home of the kelpie sheepdog. It is in the Green Triangle – an extensive forest area astride the South Australian and Victorian border.

“The exchange is a great learning experience and is helping a change in my career direction,” said Dane.

Last year his company decided to send him to Albany in WA to learn harvest-planning skills. Timbercorp’s first large Victorian blue gum plantations will be ready to harvest in two or three years and Dane plans to be ready to practise his newly found skills then.

“Harvest planning consists of preparing and setting up everything we need for harvest, including roads suitable for chip trucks, and the infield chipping.

“I also liaise with shires and neighbours to minimise disruption to their lives. When items of special value – rare fauna or cultural artefacts – are involved, I liaise with CALM and other authorities.

“I then draw up a harvest plan, document all the issues, and make recommendations.”

But life for Dane in WA is not all work. He’s honed his surfing skills over summer and is planning to invest in a new fishing rod for winter.

He is also working to set up a branch of Timber Communities Australia (TCA) in Albany. In Hamilton he was the inaugural branch president.

Dane says TCA provides a voice for the people and their families who work in forestry. It has credibility with the Government and seeks to protect the industry and show that it gives a lot back to the community.

Dane is concerned that the Federal Government is reviewing tax laws, which might impact on the plantation timber industry.

Plantation timber companies, such as Timbercorp, lease and buy land in the southwest of WA. They then renegotiate the lease after one or two treecrop rotations.

Site requirements vary between companies, but most tree farming land is selected on the basis of soil depth, rainfall – the higher the better – fertility and closeness to the port.

“Leasing land provides additional income for farmers. We practise agroforestry by incorporating farm elements such as shelterbelts.

“We fence off plantations and don’t graze them because of problems with soil compaction. It is also difficult to muster stock among the trees.

“Plantation timber provides an attractive income stream for farmers and farming communities. It supports farm incomes, and when the kids are not returning to the farm, it allows farmers to retire gracefully and still own the farm.

“Studies show a positive influence on jobs in rural communities. Blue gums increase employment and benefit the rural economy.”

Dane said blue gums also have environmental value because they fix carbon.

“They lock up a hell of a lot of carbon.”

In a year, 50 trees fix as much carbon dioxide as is produced on average by one car.

“Given the effect of carbon dioxide on global warming it is essential that we fix as much carbon from emissions as possible.

“Plantation timber is reversing the effect of land clearing and loss of biodiversity,” he said.

Timbercorp is planning to add value to Australian chips by participating in the construction of a pulp mill at Heywood 20km north of Portland in Victoria and another at Penola in South Australia. The mills will ship pulp to Europe and China.

Dane responds to criticism that the southwest of WA is being converted to wall-to-wall blue gums.

“It is a case of beef to blue gums, but it won’t go on for ever. When the end point is reached there will still be much more grazing land than blue gum plantations.

“Plantations aren’t aiming to take over the world. Just striving to reach a sustainable level,” he said.