

## Sandalwood Field Day

On Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> of April a small interested group of people came to **Ko-Warra Native Grasses** nursery at Echuca to hear expert Dr. Geoff Woodall speak on the economics and agronomics of growing Sandalwood. *Santalum acuminatum* is a related species which grows in the lighter soils throughout our region along with *Santalum lanceolata*, which is now classified as rare in Victoria.

*Santalum spicatum* is growing on a 0.5 ha trial site at **Ko-Warra Native Grasses** nursery where the group viewed the growth of the plantation which was planted in the spring of 2006. Sandalwood has a number of uses, including incense and josticks for the Asian market along with timber for Holy Temples. It also is used in the fragrance industry. The market at the moment is mainly derived from wild stands in Western Australia. The area planted is about 10,000 ha. Due to the fact that it takes around 20 years in a 400mm rainfall area before harvesting commences, decisions are difficult when assessing future markets.

Geoff said the growth rate of this plot was comparable to rates achieved in the Western Australian commercial plots. Sandalwood is a parasite which prefers Acacia host plants. If in the earlier stages of growth the plant cannot find a tree to attach to it will grow on summer weeds until it reaches a host tree.

The plot was direct seeded with the two sandalwood nuts onto seedling stock grown at Ko-Warra Native Grasses nursery. A primary host had the nuts directed onto the seedling root ball, with a secondary indigenous Acacia planted in between. With the extreme dry spring encountered, hand watering was provided at intervals until Christmas to encourage the growth of the Sandalwood. Geoff stated that under commercial conditions this would not be a viable option.

**Ko-Warra Native Grasses** is working in conjunction with Dr. Geoff Woodall at The Centre of Excellence in Natural Resource Management (University of WA) in determining which local indigenous Acacia's act as the preferred host plants. Geoff stated that from the evidence so far from the trial, if you were planning to grow a commercial plot of Sandalwoods it would be preferable to use *Acacia implexa*, (78% sandalwood presence) *Acacia pendula* (50% sandalwood presence) *Acacia stenophylla* (90% sandalwood presence) as these trees are performing very well under trying climatic conditions. In the earlier Western Australian Sandalwood sites which are now approaching 10 years old, seed harvesting has been yielding from 300 kg to 600 kgs per ha at a marketable rate of \$40 per kg. Geoff noted that the price would come down as more of the commercial sites harvested seed and the industry slowed its rapid development.

Geoff said that well drained deep loams could produce 2-4 t/ha and that 20 year old plantation grown wood in today's market would sell for approximately \$5,000/t with price dictated by the wood's oil content.

Geoff ended the day inspecting a site of 800 year old Sandalwood *lanceolata* at Torrumbarry which is one of only 8 sites left in Victoria.