

MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday 13 March 2008

Attention chiefs of staff, news directors

How to tackle tree decline in the Midlands

A workshop to address tree decline in the Midlands will be held this Friday from 9:45am in Oatlands, led by Dr Neil Davidson of the University of Tasmania School of Plant Science and CRC for Forestry, and supported by Greening Australia.

Tree decline is the most extensive form of land degradation in Tasmania affecting 42 per cent of private land with the worst hit areas being in the Midlands and the Upper Derwent Valley.

Sebastian Burgess, Operations Manager at Greening Australia, said the workshop will include practical information sharing and on-farm demonstrations about how to reverse tree decline.

"We must avoid any further rural tree decline. It results in land degradation and impacts on biodiversity due to habitat loss. Landowners from around the Midlands will share information and will learn from other landowners and researchers about restoration techniques", said Mr Burgess.

Dr Davidson said that a recent study has shown the key factors involved in tree decline in the Midlands are related to the soil and understorey beneath the trees.

"Possums, insects and drought have been blamed for tree decline in the past, but this study has shown that changes we have made to soils and native vegetation beneath the trees - principally caused by grazing - has weakened trees so when droughts occur trees die", said Dr Davidson.

Retaining the surviving native components of the understorey (usually native grasses and sedges) is important but we need to add the missing elements (seedlings of trees and shrubs) and control or displace weeds and pasture grasses, said Dr Davidson

"In a hostile environment we need to get the restoration techniques right", he said.

Restoration techniques being used include patch scale cultivation or scarification, patch scale hot fires to provide ash beds for seedlings, importing woody debris to provide shelter and shade seedlings, planting and seeding of local native species and control of weeds and browsing animals.

These elements form part of an environment that suits trees. Native dry forests are adapted to low nutrient status, light stocking of animals, a native understorey of multiple layers (grass, shrubs and trees), woody debris on the ground, different age classes of trees, and fire regime of the correct interval and intensity.

The workshop will explore how to best apply treatments using on-farm materials and will visit demonstration sites at "Weedington" and "Lilliesleaf", both close to Oatlands.

The workshop will be held 9:45am – 3pm Friday 14 March at The Stables, 85 High St, Oatlands.

The workshop is supported by Greening Australia, CRC for Forestry, University of Tasmania, NRM South and CSIRO.

Further information on the workshop contact:

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