

WHEATBELT FARMERS TAP INTO OIL

JENNE BRAMMER

A small Wheatbelt business that has become Australia's biggest producer of eucalyptus oil wants to use its waste to develop other business lines, including electricity.

Based at Kalannie, 260km north-east of Perth, Kochii Eucalyptus Oil is on track to produce 130 tonnes of eucalyptus oil this year using trees planted by farmers as part of a plan to reduce salinity on their properties.

Kochii chief operating officer Steve Meerwald said while 90 per cent of the global supply of eucalyptus oil was produced in

China, there was strong demand for a genuine Australian product.

And the small management team are already eyeing the next stage by turning the business' by-products into an income stream.

Mr Meerwald said profits from oil production alone were marginal and adding other income streams to the mix would help Kochii become a big, viable business.

He said Kochii would next month commission a \$1 million pyrolysis plant to convert the mulch remaining after oil extraction into biochar, a carbon-rich form



of charcoal, and wood vinegar, used to stimulate plant growth.

Once the char and wood vinegar market was proved, Kochii would move to the next stage of installing more

sophisticated pyrolysis equipment to capture the syngas generated as part of the process. Syngas can power combustion engines to produce renewable electricity.

"Based on production of the Kalannie site eventually reaching about 200 tonnes of oil, pyrolysing the waste biomass could create one megawatt of baseload electricity – enough to power the town of Kalannie," Mr Meerwald said.

Kochii's ultimate plan is to replicate this model of eucalyptus oil and value-added products at suitable sites across the Wheatbelt.



Mike Walter, Ian Stanley and Steve Meerwald with eucalyptus tree mulch. Inset: Emilie Bell and Steve Meerwald pour eucalyptus oil at the Kalannie distillery.

Call centres boost to create jobs

The State Government has committed \$10 million to fast-track the set-up of WA call centres and back-office services in a move set to create hundreds of new jobs.

Many call centres and back-office processes services in Australia and overseas had to scale back or stop operations because of the impact of COVID-19 on business continuity.

The State Budget, to be handed down on October 8, will include up to \$10 million in grants to increase the number of call centres and BOP services.

Organisations will be able to use the grants to offset costs that hinder the viability and competitiveness of these centres.

Applications are being invited from companies operating call and BOP centres, in Australia or internationally, to help fast-track the establishment or expansion of these centres.

Each centre is expected to create at least 200 new jobs.

Premier Mark McGowan said the move will create a bigger local industry and lead to hundreds of new jobs.

"Our hard border and \$5.5 billion WA Recovery Plan has meant WA has been successful in recovery jobs lost during the pandemic," he said. "However, there is still more work to do and we are focused on attracting investment in our State to create jobs for locals."

Co-investment key to NBN's fibre rollout

KATE PURNELL

NBN Co boss Stephen Rue has defended the company's history of delayed broadband rollouts following the announcement of a new national \$4.5 billion network investment plan.

"In terms of rollout speed, we actually said we would deliver to every home and business across Australia high-speed broadband by 2020 and I think we have done that," Mr Rue said.

NBN has previously come under fire for lengthy delays, with reports suggesting some home owners waited more than a year.

The new investment will cover a transfer to fibre, with the expectation it will significantly improve internet speeds up to one gigabit a second.

But it is not known what the investment will mean to WA.

Mr Rue said he expected WA's regional areas would benefit from the rollout and the State would receive a "significant component" of the investment, however specific logistics had not yet been determined.

He noted that it would require co-investment and support from either State Government or local councils to put the plans in motion.

"There is opportunity for various levels of government ... to work with NBN," he said.

Liquidator sues trio over \$1.9m payments

NEALE PRIOR

The legal problems are mounting for Peter Landau, with the liquidator of failed mining company Continental Coal suing the Perth dealmaker and two associates for more than \$1.9 million.

The Supreme Court civil action against Mr Landau, Jane Flegg and Paul D'Sylva comes a month after Federal authorities criminally charged the three former Continental office holders over money transfers in 2014.

Mr Landau, pictured right, is now fighting a total of 82 criminal charges after Australian Securities and Investment Commission investigations into the affairs of Landau-linked companies, including the South

African-focused Continental and Citation Resources.

Ms Flegg is fighting an identical raft of criminal charges over dealings at Citation and Continental, including the alleged misuse of Continental's bridging finance and rights issue money proceeds from February to October 2014.

Dr D'Sylva faces two charges over the alleged misuse of bridging finance in February 2014.

The civil action by the Continental liquidator Rob Kirman covers \$1.9 million of payments to a variety of entities from September to November 2014.

This included a total of \$1.42 million allegedly transferred to Mr Landau's corporate advisory firm Okap Ventures and \$100,000

sent to the Landau-directed Doull Holdings.

Mr Kirman claims in his Supreme Court writ that Continental did not receive any benefit or suffered a detriment because of the payments.

He said Mr Landau, Ms Flegg and Dr D'Sylva failed to prevent the transfers and therefore breached their duties as officers of Continental.

The liquidator is seeking orders that the trio pay \$1.9 million of compensation in respect of the money transfers, plus interest.

Neither Mr Landau, Ms Flegg nor Dr D'Sylva could be contacted yesterday.

ASIC success-

fully asked the Federal Court to wind up Continental in a 2016 application after the collapse of the company's deal to sell its 74 per cent interest in its South African mining business.

Lawyers for Continental had argued the ASIC application would kill a restructure offer for the one-time South African coal developer.

Federal authorities in March charged Ms Flegg and Mr Landau with 61 counts of stealing, with ASIC alleging in a public statement they stole

more than \$2.2 million from Citation between June 2015 and February 2016. Their charges are back in Perth Magistrate's

Court on October 20.

