

ALERT: WA Native Sandalwood 'Red-listed' as threatened by IUCN

January 2022

In a major new development, WA's fragrant and commercially lucrative native sandalwood (*Santalum spicatum*; dutjahn; willarak) has been added to the IUCN's international threatened species "[Red List](#)".

Now it's time to end 175 years of unsustainable native sandalwood plunder across southern WA.

"Across its entire range in Australia's western and southern rangelands, Australian sandalwood is on a path towards extinction in the wild."

[Prolific or precarious: A review of the status of Australian sandalwood. R. McLellan *et al*, The Rangeland Journal, CSIRO Publishing (2021)]

Our beautiful slow-growing, long-lived, oil-rich, fire-sensitive native sandalwood is on a dangerous downward trend in the wild, accelerated by climate change and unsustainable overexploitation by WA's government-owned Forest Products Commission (FPC). *S. spicatum* also grows in South Australia but is already listed as an endangered species there.

Sandalwood 'pulling' (the whole live tree is uprooted) and export began in WA in the mid-1840s, soon after the establishment of the Swan River colony. As an unregulated colonial 'boom' industry it resulted in almost total decimation of native sandalwood from much of its original range across WA's south west and Wheatbelt. Sandalwood's remaining substantial wild populations are in the semi-arid 'pastoral' zones of inland WA.

Under the current annual extraction quota set by the WA State government in 2016 - i.e., 1,250 tonnes of live ('green') sandalwood per year, FPC uproots around 40,000 mature/old growth sandalwood trees each year. Each one of these slow growing small trees is likely to be well over 100 years and probably well over 200 years old. A further 1,250 tonnes of dead sandalwood is also available under the quota.

FPC contractors literally rip these ancient, ecologically- and culturally-significant trees out of the ground with no consideration of any values other than their economic potential. For a variety of well known reasons (discussed in the paper cited above and links below) there is little or no natural regeneration and recruitment, so each one of these trees is effectively irreplaceable.

It's a bit like hunting whales or killing elephants for their tusks.

Of course being the foresters they are, FPC is desperate to keep its wild-take sandalwood pulling business going for as long as possible. Unlike its soon-to-be-halted logging of south west WA's native forests, FPC actually makes a profit out of exploiting wild sandalwood!

And just as with native forests, FPC is doing all it can to hold back the sandalwood plantation industry, which has over 20,000 hectares of *S. spicatum* plantations established and is already producing 1000+ tpa in WA's Wheatbelt (not to be confused with the 'Indian sandalwood' plantations in the Ord irrigation area in the Kimberley). FPC wants to keep delaying the transition to this huge sustainable resource for as long as possible to maintain its profits from the wild harvest. (The WA Government owns all wild sandalwood trees in the State, irrespective of who owns or manages the land).

Sandalwood was once prolific and highly valued across the lands of many southern WA First Nations peoples. That is no longer the case due to coloniser's greed and the government's ongoing unsustainable colonial approach to forestry. As usual it is the First Nations people who have lost most and benefited least from the 175 year plunder of sandalwood and it is they who must be enabled to manage any ongoing sustainable wild-take business.

The only ethical native sandalwood industry that can continue into the future in WA is a combination of a premium, well-managed, sustainable, wild-take industry owned by First Nations people for the benefit of First Nations communities (which is already starting at [Dutjahn Sandalwood Oils](#)), together with the emerging large plantation sandalwood industry on over-cleared farmland across the Wheatbelt.

The FPC should be stripped of any ongoing involvement in sandalwood, and focus solely on looking after its poorly managed softwood pine plantations in the south west. A consortium of community organisations (inc. TWS, CCWA, WAWS), Aboriginal enterprises (e.g., Dutjahn), plantation companies (e.g., WA Sandalwood Plantations), and other experts have offered to help the WA government make the transition to a truly sustainable industry.

We just need a brave and science-based government to call a halt to the current situation that has put sandalwood on a precipitous downward trajectory towards being extinct in the wild.

The WA McGowan government must not under any circumstance cave-in to allow another 10 years of FPC-run wild sandalwood mining, when the current quota expires at the end of 2025. The current Minister responsible for the FPC is Hon. Dave Kelly MLA: Dave.Kelly@mp.wa.gov.au.

Feel free to ask for further info on any of the matters mentioned above: pgmrobbo@gmail.com

BUYER BEWARE: Please do not purchase WA sandalwood (*Santalum spicatum*) products unless they come from either certified plantation sources or a certified Indigenous-owned and operated wild sandalwood business.

See also:

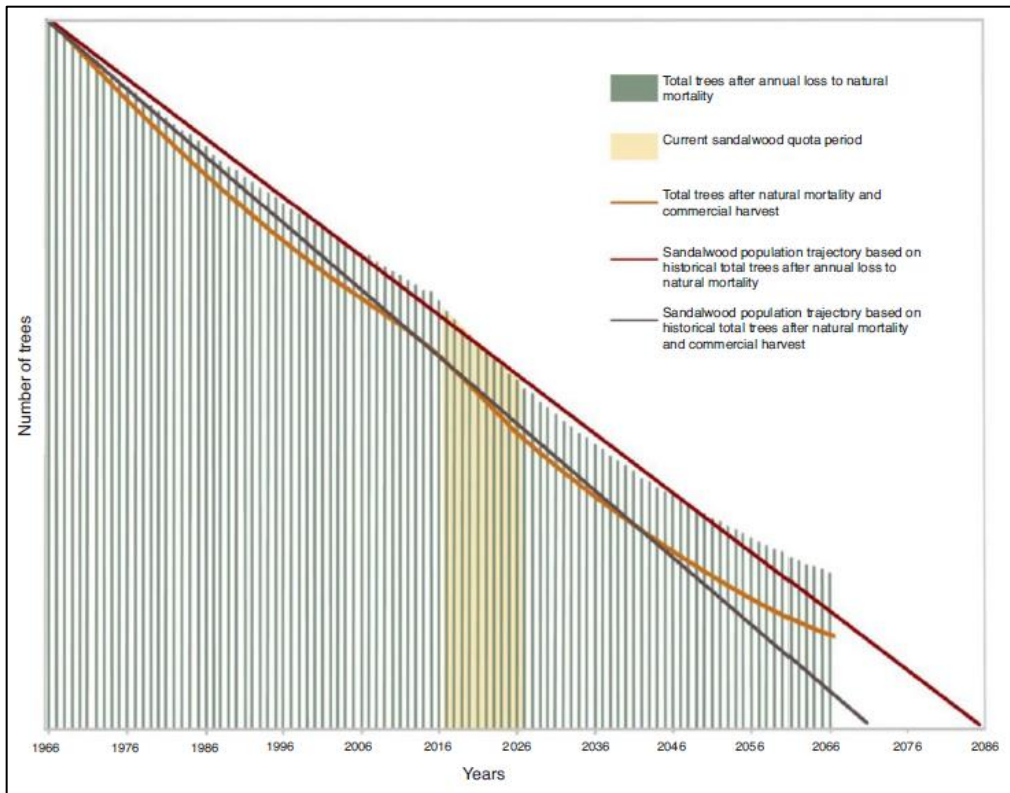
<https://theconversation.com/loved-to-death-australian-sandalwood-is-facing-extinction-in-the-wild-167281>

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-10-07/sandalwood-plantation-push-allays-fears-of-extinction/100518578>

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-11-20/fears-australian-native-sandalwood-pushed-to-extinction/100606076>



The wild sandalwood plunder underway near Kalgoorlie.



The decline of sandalwood in the wild. The FPC produced the original version of this diagram but included a ludicrously optimistic v-shaped line suggesting that there was going to be a miraculous improvement in regeneration and recruitment of sandalwood during the current 10 year quota period. This more credible version above from the McLellan *et al* paper.

