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*Presentation to the*

## House of Representatives Primary Industries and Resources Committee Inquiry into Australian Farmers and Climate Change

*by the*

### **Otway Agroforestry Network**

(with the Australian Master TreeGrower Program)

The Otway Agroforestry Network (OAN) is a not-for-profit community organization striving to encourage the wider adoption of vegetation management as an integral component of productive and environmentally sustainable agriculture. The OAN has 300 members and is recognized as a national leader in the community development. We focus on facilitating and supporting farmer participation in R&D using social networking, peer support, education, product research, and market development. We help farmers design and manage forests that meet their own needs as well as providing environmental and commercial benefits for the wider community.

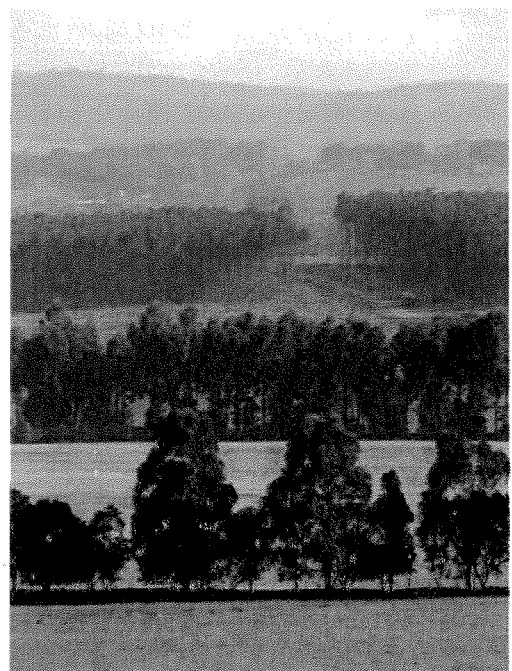
The Australian Master TreeGrower Program (MTG) is a national extension and education program hosted by the University of Melbourne and supported by the Federal Government's RDC (RIRDC and LWA). More than 1750 landholders across Australia have completed the 8-day course that was developed with the OAN in 1996. The MTG has also set up 2 pilot peer group mentoring projects in WA. The MTG is helping 'roll-out' the Otway Network's successful community development model nationally.

### **Agroforestry and a Changing Climate**

Agroforestry is the strategic integration of multipurpose trees and shrubs into farming systems to enhance productivity and protect natural resources. Agroforestry offers a means of implementing multi-functional agriculture - something which is urgently needed across the nation. Improved water quality in our streams, protection of soils, crops and livestock, the conservation of our unique flora and fauna and the promise of alternative timber sources and other forest products, make well managed trees on farms a good story for rural communities and the nation as a whole.

**Agroforestry can help farmers face the challenges of a changing climate.** The key is risk management - trees are a tool that farmers can use to reduce risk, increase resilience and create complementary income opportunities. Like fences and pastures, trees are part of the farm's productive infrastructure. With knowledge, confidence, support and access to appropriate resources and markets, farmers can establish and manage trees on their land to:

- (1) **Ameliorate** the effects of extreme and unpredictable climatic events on agricultural production.
- (2) **Diversify** their farming business by producing products and services that are independent of traditional agricultural markets and less susceptible to climatic variability.
- (3) **Sequester** CO<sup>2</sup> in living biomass and woody products thus offsetting agricultural emissions and providing marketing and partnership opportunities.



## The Otway Agroforestry Network development model

The use of trees and shrubs to support agricultural systems, and the land on which they depend, is not new. What is new and innovative is the research, development and extension approach that has been developed by the OAN and MTG to engage with the farming community to assist them 'use' trees to develop sustainable and economical farming systems that reflect their interests, needs and aspirations.

### The Key elements of the approach are:

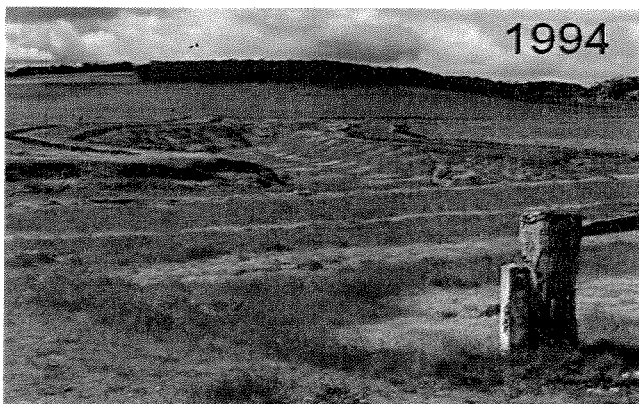
- (1) Develop and support **regional landholder networks** that support and represent the interests of farmers
- (2) Provide **education and extension support** that is directly relevant to the interests and needs of the landholders (MTG courses, Site Visit Reports, Peer Group Mentors)
- (3) Research, develop and facilitate commercial **markets for tree and forest products and services**



## Resource needs

Indicative resource needs for a national roll-out of a 'farmer-led' agroforestry development model:

- (1) Funding for regional **agroforestry networks** (e.g. OAN - \$250,000 per year)
- (2) Funding for the **national roll-out of education and peer mentoring projects** (e.g. MTG - \$500,000 per year)
- (3) Funding for a **national agroforestry R&D program** that engages R&D providers who are willing to work with regional groups to review R&D needs, undertake research and integrate knowledge into farming practices (e.g. RIRDC \$1M per year).



**Andrew Stewart** - Coordinator Otway Agroforestry Network

Yan Yan Gurt West, 2005 Winchelsea-Deans Marsh Rd. Deans Marsh, Vic. 3235

Email: [yanyangurtwest@bluemaxx.com.au](mailto:yanyangurtwest@bluemaxx.com.au)

**Rowan Reid** - Coordinator of the Australian Master TreeGrower Program

The University of Melbourne, Burnley Campus, 500 Yarra Boulevard, Richmond, VICTORIA, 3121

Email: [rfr@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:rfr@unimelb.edu.au), Web: [www.mtg.unimelb.edu.au](http://www.mtg.unimelb.edu.au)