



## Optimism lifts production at Rappville

PRODUCTION of tea tree oil at the world's largest commercial plantation, Main Camp Natural Extracts at Rappville near Casino on the Far North Coast, is being ramped up on the back of the optimistic outlook for growth in demand.

Established in 1980, at its peak the property had 1500 hectares of tea tree under production.

Half of that remains today, after much of the country was turned

over to timber plantations last decade.

New investors took over four years ago and since then new tea tree paddocks have been established, including some plantings of industry-bred varieties, which managers hope will lead to yield increases of up to 40pc.

Main Camp has also diversified into sugar cane.

The company sells pure oil to overseas and Australian

manufacturers of cosmetic and health products and believes there is genuine growth in demand for tea tree oil, boosted by continuing research findings into its health benefits.

Farm manager John Frazier said yields were down this year because of February floods and then a "very dry run" since August.

Mr Frazier is pictured with Main Camp natural extracts managing director Phillip Butlin in a tea tree plantation.

# Tea tree too successful

By SHAN GOODWIN

AUSTRALIAN tea tree growers are battling a flood of adulterated pharmaceutical imports riding on fast-growing demand for the oil. Recent research has linked enormous health benefits to the oil extracted from the native plant's leaves.

Global demand for tea tree oil, the majority of which is produced in the north eastern part of NSW, is rising quickly, underpinned by its effectiveness in trials to treat a long list of health issues ranging from acne to non-melanoma skin cancer.

These come on top of its recognised antiseptic, anti-bacterial, anti-fungal, anti-inflammatory and anti-viral properties.

About 400 tonnes, or 80 per cent of national production of tea tree oil is exported annually to manufacturers of

cosmetics and health products.

Wholesale prices have risen 25pc in the past year to \$40 a kilogram.

Ten years ago it was trading around \$15/kg.

But tough seasonal conditions in the Northern Rivers in the past two years have taken a big toll on yields and supply will remain tight until the start of the 2014 harvest next April.

Industry leaders say the combination of the growth in demand and lower supply should be putting a lot more upward pressure on prices but adulterated overseas products are now filling the gap.

The long-term implications if consumers are driven away from tea tree oil by bad experiences with impure products would be devastating for the

industry, said Australian Tea Tree Industry Association's (ATTIA) Tony Larkman.

Manufacturers of blended oils carefully balance the mix of components they use to ensure that all of the physical properties of their oil conform to the international standard, making detection difficult.

ATTIA has developed a test to submit to the International Standards Organisation adding chiral purity testing to the standard, which Mr Larkman said would make the adulteration process more expensive.

Growers have also launched an education program targeting both consumers and the supply chain, urging them to insist on Code of Practice accredited pure Australian tea tree oil.

Products that meet the code can use the green and gold Pure Australian Tea Tree Oil label.

About 4000 hectares is now under tea tree production, from West Wyalong to Far North Queensland, with average production at 200kg/ha.

Since 1982 there has been a 175pc increase in annual production and a 147pc increase in annual export value.



### Some oils ain't pure oils

THE Australian Tea Tree Industry Association (ATTIA) had 60 samples of products labelled as pure tea tree oil collected from Australian companies and 40 from overseas companies independently analysed this year.

"Initial results are showing all Australia samples, except one, was pure tea tree oil (TTO) but a significant number from other countries were adulterated," said the ATTIA industry development officer Tony Larkman.

"One in four from Germany were adulterated, 100 per cent from China, 75pc from the US and 90pc from the UK."

The products are blended with terpinen-4-ol, a byproduct of the processing of other oils such as sandalwood, pine oil and eucalyptus - effectively industrial waste.

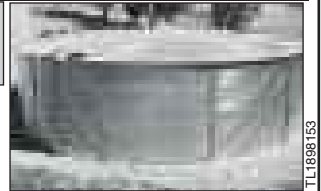
"Most were adulterated to the tune of 10 to 30pc, although some were 100pc waste product," Mr Larkman said.

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