



Media Release

Better Disposal of Plastics in the Gascoyne

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There may soon be much less plastic mulch film going to landfill in the Gascoyne thanks to work being undertaken by the Gascoyne Development Commission and Bowman & Associates to look for biodegradable and recycling alternatives.

Traditionally fruit and vegetable plantations are covered by thin plastic mulch film to suppress weed growth and improve crop production, underlain by plastic drip irrigation tape. Plastic crop nets are used also to reduce damage from birds, sun and wind.

“Currently the plantations dispose of more than 15,000m³ (about 103 tonnes) of black plastic film each year,” Bowman & Associates Manager Bruce Bowman said.

“Much of the plastic is transported to the Brown Range Landfill whilst the remainder of local growers either burying or stockpiling it on their properties.”

Stockpiling plastic on the banks of the Gascoyne River poses a risk of being washed out to sea when the river floods.

The Gascoyne Development Commission and Bowman & Associates are looking at the options available for the reuse of plastic mulch film and other plastic waste products of Carnarvon’s horticulture industry.

These options are being examined with the help of funding support under the Waste Authority’s Strategic Waste Initiatives Scheme using funding from the levy on all waste that goes to landfill.

“We have discovered that alternative biodegradable agricultural film products are available in Australia and there is one product that has been successfully trialled in Queensland and Spain,” Mr Bowman said.

“There is also another viable paper mulch product which contributes carbon to the soil profile. This is of particular benefit in the Gascoyne where the soils are typically low in organic matter.”

However these alternatives come with a hefty price tag that horticulturists are not ready to pay without some form of industry assistance.

Mr Bowman said it is hoped that there will be more attractive opportunities such as an option supported by the growers like the development of industry-led Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes, or the successful MobileMuster program for mobile phones and *drumMUSTER* for used chemical drums.

Under EPR schemes the producers of plastic mulch film and irrigation tape would develop programs to recycle or re-use their product, thereby completing the recycling circle. A recycling levy or deposit might be paid at the point of sale of the plastics, which would then be recouped by growers once their waste plastics had been sent to a recycling facility.

Horticultural plastics are currently recycled in South Australia to produce recycled poly pipe.

The Waste Authority grants, through the Strategic Waste Initiatives Scheme, greatly assist in diverting more waste from landfill.

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