

Media Release: 5th March 2011

Propagating Native Plants with Biochar

In 2011 the Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment and Greening Australia Victoria will jointly investigate the potential benefits of using biochar¹ to assist in the propagation of currently difficult to germinate Australian native plant species.

The project, which has recently commenced, is investigating a number of difficult to propagate native plant species using biochar at different percentage levels compared with smoke water treatments and standard practice growing media.

Two nurseries; *Kyeema Seawinds* which is a supported employment centre located within the Portland Aluminium precinct and Chatsworth based *Franklin Plant Native* will run parallel trials to monitor germination responses and ongoing seedling root development to determine if biochar is a beneficial additive.

This exciting project aims to apply scientific rigour to results already achieved by Kyeema Seawinds Nursery in the past twelve months where staff have observed improved native seed germination responses after adding biochar to growing media.

Greening Australia's Alcoa Landcare South West Seedbank Manager Doug Phillips said

"This collaboration is most welcome and will allow us to scientifically examine the potential benefits that biochar could offer for nursery plant propagation and serves to expand on continuing Australian research looking at the responses of agricultural crop species in biochar-amended soils."

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¹**Biochar** is a fine-grained charcoal produced in an oxygen-depleted environment via second generation bioenergy processes such as gasification and pyrolysis. It differs from charcoal due to its use as a soil amendment rather than as a fuel