



## Fury over scientist's farmer 'insult'

**Andrew Brosnan**

The Shire of Esperance is furious about recent comments suggesting land north of the town is unusable for agricultural purposes, calling them an "insult" to farmers in the region.

President Malcolm Heasman yesterday labelled the comments a "political stunt" and said they were a response to the Shire's decision to consider the area for future agricultural development.

Earlier this week a group of WA scientists announced it was cam-

paigning for a massive chunk of WA, stretching from Shark Bay to Esperance, to become a UNESCO world heritage area.

Led by University of WA plant biologist Professor Hans Lambers, the group claims the area is one of 25 "global biodiversity hotspots" and is home to more than 8000 species of plants.

Professor Lambers said the area in question lacked the soil nutrients required for farming, yet it housed an extremely rich and diverse range of flora.

But speaking to the *Kalgoorlie Miner*, Cr Heasman questioned the validity of those claims and said the group of scientists was simply against any further agricultural development in the area.

"(The comments are) actually disparaging to the farming community that farms the sandplain because it alludes to the fact that the soils are poor, that it's not capable of generating anything," he said.

"These people need to come and

speak to the people that are farming on the Esperance sandplain and find out the yields that they are

achieving. To me, that article was an insult to the agricultural community of this shire and there is no doubt what it is designed to do is to ensure there is no further land released to the north of these agricultural footprints."

Professor Lambers yesterday disputed Cr Heasman's comments and said the area to be included in the heritage application was "just too risky" for farming projects.

"The area is very sandy indeed and that's why most of the nutrients have disappeared from the system over many years," he said.

"(Also) the rainfall is just too low and that's the reason why it hasn't been cleared up until now, the rainfall is decreasing in that part of the world."

Professor Lambers and fellow advocates expect to submit a heritage application to the State Government mid-year.

Cr Heasman said the Shire was still receiving community feedback regarding possible agricultural expansion in the area, but would "absolutely" consider making its own submissions to the Government in the future.



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**Supporters of a push for world heritage listing of the Fitzgerald River National Park have drawn the ire of Esperance shire president Malcolm Heasman.** Picture: Kim Cousins