

Industry recognition of tree seed hunter: Dr Kenneth Eldridge



(Left to right) CSIRO Plant Industry's Deputy Chief Dr Mark Peoples presenting Dr Ken Eldridge with the special lifetime achievement award

The **Southern Tree Breeding Association (STBA)** recently acknowledged the personal commitment and efforts of CSIRO Honorary Research Fellow **Dr Ken Eldridge**, by presenting him with a special lifetime achievement award for his outstanding contribution to tree improvement. The STBA undertakes the national tree breeding program in Australia for radiata pine and is currently celebrating its 25th anniversary.

Ken started his pioneering research on genetic variation and breeding of radiata pine and *Eucalyptus regnans* in 1958 at Traralgon, Victoria. So, the year 2008 marks his 50th anniversary of tree breeding research for the Australian forestry industry.

Among his numerous contributions to tree breeding in Australia and internationally, two have been identified as particularly outstanding. Firstly, Ken authored a major scientific textbook, *'Eucalypt Domestication and Breeding'* which became a bible for Eucalypt breeding and research internationally over the last 15 years. Secondly, his 1978 collection of native radiata pine genetic material (provenances and families), known as the Eldridge collection, resulted in genetic and conservation trials on more than 100 sites worldwide.

The Eldridge collection and subsequent conservation and genetic trials were major achievements because they:

- provided a text book example of successful *ex-situ* genetic conservation;
 - established a world-wide 'gene pool' to protect the species against threats from major disease and pests for the more than 4 million hectares of plantation, while it's five native populations in USA and Mexico are under threat of the major disease (pitch canker);
 - provided access to new genetic variation, lifting genetic gain for commercial plantations on a range of economically important traits including wood quality, drought resistance, climatic adaptation, and productivity.
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