



Gorse set to fuel Chinese barbecues in win-win for farmers and the environment

936 ABC Hobart By Carol Rääbus

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PHOTO: A Tasmanian business plans to turn the state's gorse problem into a renewable fuel solution. (ABC Rural: Tony Briscoe)

Take a drive along the Midland Highway through Tasmania and you will see hillsides covered in thousands of gorse plants.

The spikey evergreen has become a major problem for farmers and the state's environment since it was introduced

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"It tends to like the conditions down here," John Boland from Gorse Power told Leon Compton on 936 ABC Hobart.

"We have an infestation, according to the National Gorse Taskforce, of between 60,000 and 100,000 hectares.

"There's only 800,000 hectares of available land here in Tasmania."

But Mr Boland and Matt Bennett believe they can turn this gorse problem into cash by harvesting it and selling it to China as a fuel.

"It's basically going to be replacing coal as a major fuel source for the solid barbecue market," Mr Bennett said.

"[Barbecue] is a very popular way of cooking in China, especially with the high-rise living [there]."

Mr Bennett and Mr Boland's company Tasmanian Renewable Energy Enterprises is building a factory at Conara in the state's north to turn gorse into compacted biomass fuel, which they are calling Gorse Power.

"Gorse has been prized as a fuel for centuries," Mr Bennett said.

"It used to be a prized fuel for bakers and for potters to fire kilns because it burns extremely hot and it burns hot fast.

"It's [also] almost smoke free when it burns.

"We're reinventing a fuel that's been prized for a long, long time."

They expect to employ about 20 people to harvest the gorse and compact it into usable barbecue bricks.

With thousands of hectares of gorse growing across farming land, the resource is close to endless.

"The important thing about the project is unlike in the past where the state or the federal government has thrown a lot of money at the problem, this is a marketplace solution," Mr Boland said.

Facts about gorse

- Ulex is the name for the plant commonly known as gorse in Australia and Europe.
- It is a very spikey evergreen with bright yellow flowers in spring and autumn.
- Gorse was introduced to Australia as a hedging plant with European settlement.
- Gorse is listed as weed of national significance in Australia.
- Gorse seeds are released in hot and dry conditions and can lie dormant in soil for up to 30 years.
- Removal of gorse is difficult due to its sharp spikes and hardy nature.
- A combination of cutting, poison and digging out is often required to rid an area of gorse.
- Gorse burns very well, but burning is a poor control method as it can lead to the release of seeds.



PHOTO: Gorse Power could replace compressed coal bricks as a fuel source for barbecues. (936 ABC Hobart: Carol Rääbus)

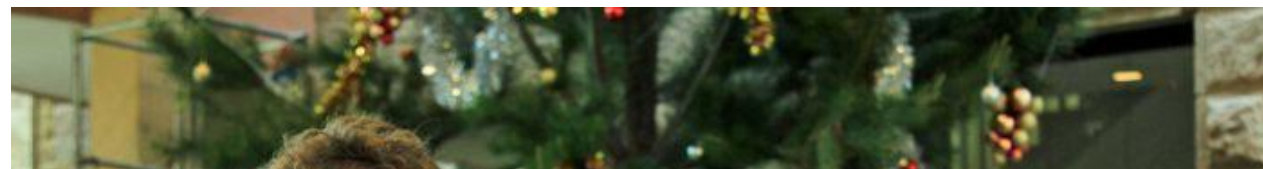




PHOTO: Matt Bennett (left) and John Boland want to help rid Tasmania of gorse by selling it as a fuel. (936 ABC Hobart: Carol Rääbus)

"[It] basically means the end user who is buying the project is paying for the removal of that gorse.

"It's a win for the farmer and it's a win for the environment."

While the gorse bricks will cost more than cheap coal fuel, Mr Boland said there was a demand for greener alternatives both in the Australian and Chinese markets.

"There's been a change in consumer sentiment in the last few years," he said.

"People want to do the right thing.

"People will chose the green product, the renewable product, over a fossil fuel product."

The factory at Conara is expected to be finished by early 2018 with exports to China to begin later that year.

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