



Australian Financial Review Tuesday 10/6/2003
General News Page 7
Circulation: 85,000
Size: 149.24 sq.cms.

Australian company goes in to bat for new venture

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The sound of leather on willow is a staple of Australian summers but for almost 50 years our cricketers have been flogging the opposition with foreign wood.

Privately owned local company Australian Cricket Bat Willow is seeking to raise up to \$5 million to help change that.

The company has already planted

17,000 willow trees – *Salix Alba v Caerulae* – on an orchard at the aptly named Wood Wood near Swan Hill on the Victoria-NSW border.

The last company to use Australian-grown willow to make cricket bats was the well-known

Crockett bat company, which was bought by the British sports giant Slazenger in 1956.

Keen to consolidate production and eradicate competition, Slazenger closed the Australian operation and cut down all the willow trees that grew near Daylesford in central Victoria.

All the trees there had grown from a single seed sent to Australia at the turn of the last century.

Australian Cricket Bat Willow is seeking \$5 million to help plant up to 40,000 trees over the next three years to produce cricket bats in Melbourne

for sale domestically and for export to India, South Africa, New Zealand and the West Indies.

ACBW chairman, and former

secretary of the Melbourne Cricket Club, Dr John Lill said the English had superbly cornered the market on quality willow cricket bats. Dr Lill said he hoped, with the support of Australia's all-conquering cricket team, ACBW could make inroads.

"The English have created a

monopoly for the supply of English willow.

"Australia has the best cricket team and our cricket balls are considered the best, yet for 50 years we have been paying other countries to produce our cricket bats," he said.

ACBW has issued a prospectus and succeeded in securing a ruling from the Australian Tax Office which allows investors in the project to claim funds as a tax deduction.