Stopping the drifting sands

A nagging problem in the Mallee is how to get vegetation to grow on sand dunes once their cover has gone. This particular problem affects many different interests, including road-makers, pipeline authorities, farmers—anybody in fact who disturbs the original trees and shrubs growing on the dunes so the sand begins to blow away.

The Army inherited problems with bare dunes on its Murray Bridge Field Firing range. It is playing host to a major experiment, designed by Mr Jack Harris of the CSIRO Division of Soils, to test out ways of stabilizing sand dunes.

The experiment was laid out in May this year on a dune that threatens the firing range's airstrip. It involved sowing cereal rye and lucerne with fertilizer, and then overspraying in strips with various emulsions to stop the sand from blowing away. The strips pass over the dune and onto surrounding soils.

Assistance is coming from the Department of Housing and Construction, which seeded the dune. Mobil Oil, J. Kitchen & Sons, and Emoleum (the spraying contractor) supplied the experimental emulsions. Mobil Oil's styrene–butadiene–latex and crude oil emulsion has been successfully used in the Middle East for tree-planting, but not in the Mallee. Mobil Oil manufactured it under licence.

It's too early for conclusive results, but the experiment's progress will be watched with interest.

If Mr Harris gets the cover crop to hold on the sands, he hopes that this will be the first step to getting the original cypress pine and other Mallee shrubs to recolonize the dunes.