

Impacts of changing landscapes on the communities of rural and regional VIC and SA

The socio-economic impacts of land-use change in the Green Triangle and Central Victoria are set to be identified with the launch today of a new research project by the Co-operative Research Centre for Forestry and partner organisations.

The area of land used by different industries - including cropping, dairy, energy generation, grazing, plantation forestry and viticulture - has changed across the project area in the past decade. These changes are typical of the land use changes experienced in many other parts of rural Australia.

The new study will assess the impacts of that change over time upon the rural communities, industries and governments of the study region, which extends from Robe in South Australia to Colac in Victoria.

The project has been designed for strong community involvement, with community members from across the study region contributing to the research through an advisory group, focus groups and surveys.

Community members will be asked to help prioritise the issues examined in the study, to help researchers to focus upon the topics of greatest relevance to the region's residents.

Project steering committee Chair, Cr Karen Stephens (Glenelg Shire) encouraged communities across the study region to get involved:

"It's these communities who will have the most interest in the results - and these communities who are best able to help us," she said today.

"Community involvement will make sure the study is relevant to those with an interest in land use change issues. It will also ensure that we can answer the key questions asked by that group," explained Jacki Schirmer, who leads the project.

Research will include a survey of the community's perceptions of land use change and its impacts, and analysis of statistical data to understand better how different land use changes have affected the social and economic characteristics of the region.

"The study allows us to compare the impacts of different types of land use change - something that very few studies have done previously in Australia," said Ms Schirmer.

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Cr Stephens highlighted important outcomes of the study and how the results will be used:

“Local governments, government agencies and different industries in the region will be able to use the results to help with their planning processes. They can then be more strategic in their response to the changes experienced across our rural landscapes,” she said.

The new study builds upon the results of a previous study undertaken in the region seven years ago by the University of Melbourne. It also benefits from similar studies undertaken in Western Australia and New South Wales, by the Bureau of Rural Sciences and the Forests and Wood Products Research and Development Corporation.

The project, which will run until mid-2008, is a collaborative effort between the Co-operative Research Centre for Forestry; Victorian Department of Primary Industries; Forest and Wood Products Research and Development Corporation; Green Triangle Regional Plantation Committee; Central Victorian Farm Plantations; Glenelg Shire Council (Vic); Moyne Shire Council (Vic) and Wattle Range Council (SA).

Previous studies, "Socio-economic impacts of plantation forestry in the Great Southern region" (144 pages) and "Socio-economic impacts of plantation forestry in the South West Slopes of New South Wales" (136 pages), plus three summary booklets, can be downloaded from <http://www.fwprdc.org.au/>

More information on the Communities Project of the CRC for Forestry can be viewed at http://www.crcforestry.com.au/RP4_3.htm

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