

CASE STUDY:

Local Government working collaboratively with industry for auditing

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA:

Latrobe City Council, Gippsland, Victoria

COMPILED BY:

Jo Roberts,
2020 Vision Coordinator, August 2006

PEOPLE INTERVIEWED:

- Fiona Fullard, Environmental Planner, Latrobe City Council
- Rob Hescock, Community Stewardship Manager, Grand Ridge Plantations

Latrobe City Council is located at the centre of Gippsland, an area of Victoria that has a mature plantation growing and processing industry with a harvest of 1.32 M m³ p.a. of plantation softwood and 250 000 m³ per annum of plantation hardwood being processed into a range of products, including paper and solid wood products.

Fiona Fullard, Environmental Planner with Latrobe City Council spends about 20% of her time working on forestry issues. She maintains a close and effective working relationship with Grand Ridge Plantations, a subsidiary of Hancocks Victorian Plantations, who are currently the main plantation manager in the Latrobe City Council area. They own and manage an extensive mature hardwood and softwood plantation estate where harvesting and re-establishment are the main plantation operations that need to be considered by local government when implementing the Code of Forest Practice.

Another company, Midway Plantations is working in partnership with Macquarie to expand the existing hardwood plantation estate by a total of 22 000 hectares in Gippsland, to provide inputs to the expanded Australian Paper mill at Maryvale. Representatives of Midway Plantations have spoken with Latrobe City Council, who are positive about the opportunity, as it is quite likely that a fair proportion of the proposed new plantation areas will be established in Latrobe City.

It is possible that as plantation expansion continues in the region that the various local Councils will need to work together regionally to consider specific aspects of planning for plantations.

As part of its responsibility in administering the Code of Forest Practice on private land, Latrobe City Council used to conduct audits of harvesting operations without actively involving the plantation owners.

In 2005, for the first time, Latrobe City ran a joint post plantation harvesting audit process with Grand Ridge Plantations. *“By combining our resources with Grand Ridge Plantations to employ an independent ‘Code of Forest Practice’ auditor we were both able to get twice the value for our investment and managed to audit just about all the harvested coupes. We both received copies of the audit report. Coupe audit follow up visits are conducted jointly with Grand Ridge Plantations. Usually the main issues highlighted relate to roading and drainage, which are essential to get right.”* said Fiona.

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Rob Hescock, Community Stewardship Manager with Grand Ridge Plantations acknowledges the benefits of collaborating with local government. *"It was important for the shire to develop trust and a working relationship with local plantation management staff. This takes time and is based on honesty and transparency. Having a designated and consistent environmental planner has also helped build our good working relationship. Other shires have planners that come and go so quickly,"* said Rob.

Initially driven by nearby Wellington Shire, Latrobe City and several of the other neighboring local councils have collaborated with the plantation industry to develop a draft Regional Local Government Compliance Procedure for Harvesting – a procedure to help all parties respond consistently when 'things go wrong'.

Fiona considers that one of the most valuable results of this process was agreement from both sides on what is acceptable when a breach occurs.

"Our local government area has the legacy of land that was cleared that shouldn't have been – very steep and with erodible soils. Plantation forestry is a good land use for this type of land – if it is done well."

"It is important for a planner to keep an open mind and look at the big picture."