



Socio-economic impacts of land use change in the Green Triangle, and Central Victoria: project proposal

Background

Continuing land use and socio-economic change has occurred across the Green Triangle and Central Victoria over the past 15 years. In 2000, a team of University of Melbourne researchers examined the socio-economic impacts of land use change in south-west Victoria, and identified extensive land use change from grazing to cropping, dairying and timber plantations (Petheram et al. 2000). During the 1990s cropping expanded by 143,000 ha, dairying by 90,000 ha and Blue Gum plantations from less than 2,000 ha to approximately 30,000 ha.

Since 2000, land use changes have continued. For example, the area under plantations in the south west is now approximately 100,000 ha while cropping and dairying have also continued to expand, replacing broad acre grazing. In addition, increasing numbers of rural residential dwellers have shifted onto rural land in parts of the region.

Proposed research

This project proposes to follow up the 2000 study, and will increase the study area to include the lower south east of South Australia¹. This will enable a better understanding of the plantation sector, which is a significant driver of land use change, in its totality.

The project will incorporate five components:

1. A participatory approach.

Throughout the project, the team will work with the Green Triangle & Central Victorian communities to ensure the study is relevant to and accepted by the community, and the results are well disseminated. The project will have a Steering Committee with representatives drawn from key industries and government agencies in the region.

2. Attitudes and values survey.

An in-depth understanding will be developed of attitudes, values and perceptions of the population of the region about socio-economic and land use changes occurring in the region. The survey will utilise a large-*N* quantitative sample survey that enables statistically significant relationships to be identified.

3. Quantify and analyse land use, industry and socio-economic change in the region using independent data.

This part of the project will utilise independent data from sources such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics to document key land use and socio-economic changes in the Green Triangle & Central Victoria since 1991, and the extent to which different types of land use change are linked to social and economic change in different parts of the region.

4. Understand shifts in the landholder population.

A survey of landholders will identify why and when landholders choose to sell or lease their properties for enterprises such as plantation forestry, and where they shift to when they leave their properties.

5. Develop community engagement and participatory modelling tools to support better communication and planning by the community regarding land use change.

This part of the project will be developed after results of the first four parts are finalised, as it will draw on the results of Parts 1-4.

¹ The Local Government Areas proposed to be included in the study are Mt Gambier (SA), Grant (SA), Wattle Range (SA), Naracoorte and Lucindale (SA), Robe (SA), Kingston (SA), West Wimmera (Vic), Glenelg (Vic), Horsham (Vic), Southern Grampians (Vic), Warrnambool (Vic), Moyné (Vic), Pyrenees (Vic), Corangamite (Vic), Colac Otway (Vic), Ararat (Vic) and Northern Grampians (Vic).



Data will be produced at the 'Statistical Local Area' (SLA) scale. Each local government area (LGA) in the study generally comprises 1-2 SLAs. By producing data at SLA scale, local government will be able to utilise project results related to their LGA and understand how their LGA differs from others nearby.

Outcomes and utilisation of project results

The key outcomes of the project will be:

- A comprehensive understanding and quantification of land use, industry and socio-economic change across the region since 1991, and how different parts of the community perceive these changes (results to be provided within 18 months).
- Strategies for improved community engagement and modelling tools to assist in planning activities related to land use change (a longer term project involving ongoing work with the community).

Local government, government agencies and different industries in the region will be able to use the results to help in their planning processes, as the results will highlight the socio-economic implications of different types of change, and hence allow these various groups to be more strategic in their response.

Project proponents

The project will be undertaken by a team of researchers from the Cooperative Research Centre for Forestry utilising skills from four universities: the Australian National University, University of Melbourne, University of Tasmania and Southern Cross University. The researchers involved have considerable experience analysing land use and socio-economic change in rural regions. The CRC is jointly funded by the Federal Government and the forest industry, enabling access to and in-depth analysis of specialised data on the forest industry's expansion of plantations in the region.

At present, the following project partners have committed cash or in-kind funding to cover two-thirds of the total \$240,000 costs of the project²:

- Green Triangle Regional Plantation Committee
- Cooperative Research Centre for Forestry (specialist staff with experience in analysing both social change in rural areas and the forest sector will provide time in-kind, and the CRC will provide research facilities)
- Victorian Department of Primary Industries (Both staff time and funds)

We are seeking additional funding (up to \$75,000) from organisations at local, State and Federal levels, with interests in the Green Triangle and Central Victoria regions to enable a comprehensive, detailed study to be undertaken incorporating all types of land use and industry change in the region.

We are also seeking expressions of interest in taking part in the project through participation in the Steering Committee or through providing other inputs, e.g. assisting through providing data on your community.

If you are interested in being part of the project...

To discuss the project proposal further, please contact:

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² The \$240,000 is the costs of Parts 1-4 of the project; funding will subsequently be sought for the development of community engagement strategies and participatory modelling techniques after finalisation of the first four elements of the project.