

Monday 17 May 2010

Attention chiefs of staff, news directors

Restricting native forest harvesting has human impacts

Does protecting native forests hurt the people whose livelihoods depend on native timber harvesting and forest products? **Edwina Loxton**, a PhD student with the CRC for Forestry, has been interviewing people involved in the forest industries in NSW and WA to find out.

Edwina's research, funded by Forest and Wood Products Australia, reveals the human stories behind the forestry employment and economic figures, to shed light on how people whose livelihoods are affected by restricting native forest harvesting feel about change and make decisions about their future.

"I am passionate about social research. It is important to find out how environmental resource management affects people, to be able to improve future policy and packages designed to minimise negative socioeconomic impacts and help to create new opportunities" says Edwina.

Her preliminary results suggest that the increased restriction of access to native forests for timber harvesting and production of timber products has had both negative and positive socioeconomic impacts on individuals and families reliant on the native forestry industry—but little work has been done to assess these impacts or to evaluate the effectiveness of structural adjustment packages.

Edwina's research is based on two case studies in north-eastern NSW and south-west WA, in which she has been exploring the social impacts of the implementation of Regional Forest Agreements, and comparing her findings to assessments undertaken when these agreements were in preparation.

In 2009 she interviewed a range of mill owners, harvesting and haulage contractors, employees, and government representatives in north-east NSW.

She was inspired by many examples of resilience and longer-term positive outcomes in her NSW interviews, and found that many members of the forest industry made significant financial and personal sacrifices in the short term to adjust their lives to changed forest access, through this achieving a long term positive outcome. She also identified many examples of negative impacts experienced by participants in the research, such as financial concerns, business insecurity and the stress of uncertain employment.

Now Edwina is launching into her second case study area, south-west WA, where those involved in the forest industry have experienced a huge amount of change in recent years due to the Regional Forest Agreement and amendments, the Protecting Our Old Growth policy, and the resulting structural adjustment package.

Edwina is looking for participants for her research from anywhere in south-west Western Australia. Edwina says that this is *“a brilliant time for people in WA to volunteer to be involved in this research, which may guide future policy and industry decision-making. This could be people who still work in the industry (including harvesting, processing and managing) or have left the industry (either because of the changes or for other reasons). It is important to talk to people with good or bad experiences”*.

To get Edwina’s contact details and read more about Edwina’s research go to the ‘current students’ page using the ‘education and outreach’ tab on the CRC for Forestry’s website

www.crcforestry.com.au

Edwina Loxton will be **available for interview** at the CRC for Forestry’s Annual Science Meeting in Fremantle WA from 17 to 21 May. Edwina as well as 25 other CRC early career researchers will be presenting their research through posters to over 100 of Australia’s forest industry research professionals on **Wednesday 19 May from 5.30pm-7.15pm** at the Esplanade Hotel Fremantle. **Interested members of the media are invited to attend.**

Edwina’s research is supported by Forest and Wood Products Australia and the CRC for Forestry. The **CRC for Forestry** is Australia’s national collaborative forestry research organisation, and the Annual Science Meeting will bring together approximately 150 forestry professionals, scientists and students in a packed program of presentations of research developments, student presentations and professional development sessions, and an innovative forestry hypothetical exploring key research issues and demonstrating the use of forestry decision-support tools available to guide forest management practices.

To organise an interview with Edwina or for further information about the CRC for Forestry and our Annual Science Meeting please contact the CRC’s Communications Manager

Dr Prue Loney on 0410 489 107.