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## Socio-economic impacts of land use change in the Green Triangle and Central Victoria

### Project Update # 1 – September 2006

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#### Introduction

Welcome to the first project update for the ‘Socio-economic impacts of land use change in the Green Triangle and Central Victoria’ project. Project updates will be provided regularly during the life of the project. The updates will include an overview of recent project activities, any changes to the project, and forthcoming events for the project.

#### What’s been happening?

##### *Project launch*

The project was launched in August by Cr. Karen Stephens, the Chairman of both the project Advisory Group and Steering Committee.

The launch attracted attention in local and regional media, with both positive and negative coverage of the project. Some concerns were raised in the media about the sources of funding for the project. The research team responded with a letter in the Warrnambool Standard (published 24/08/2006), explaining the checks and balances in place to ensure the independence of the project. Our project website, which will go online in October, will provide further information on the governance of the project and other measures being used to ensure the research is independent and of the highest academic standards.

Following the launch, the research team (Dr Kathryn Williams and Ms Caroline Dunn from the University of Melbourne, Ms Prue Borschmann from DPI Victoria and Dr Jacki Schirmer from the Australian National University) have been busy getting underway with the project.

##### *Focus groups*

The first stage in the project was to hold a series of focus groups around the study region. In the focus groups, participants were asked to:

- Identify the different types of land use change occurring in the region, particularly over the last 10-15 years, but not restricted to this time frame.
- Prioritise which land use changes were the most important. Participants were asked to use their own judgment to identify which were the most important, based on their own views about which types of land use change are having, or have had, the greatest impact on their local region.
- For each land use change rated as highly important by participants, discuss:
  - How widespread has the land use change been? (Where has it occurred? Over what time period?)
  - What factors have caused the land use change?
  - What have been the consequences of the land use change for the region?

The goal of the focus groups was to hear from people who have a diversity of views about the consequences of different types of land use change in the study region. To achieve that, the research team ensured that those invited represented a broad range of groups in the community. Participants included:

- A range of farmers and graziers from various agricultural sectors including dairy, broadacre

The project's research providers are: The Australian National University, the University of Melbourne, and Victorian Government Department of Primary Industries. The following organisations are contributing cash or in-kind funding to the project (in alphabetical order): Central Victorian Farm Plantations, Cooperative Research Centre for Forestry, Corangamite Catchment Management Authority, Forest and Wood Products Research and Development Corporation, Glenelg Shire Council, Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority, Green Triangle Regional Plantation Committee, Moyne Shire Council, Victorian Government Department of Primary Industries, and Wattle Range Council.

cropping and grazing and horticulture, amongst others;

- Members of local environmental, volunteer and community service groups;
- Rural residents other than farmers;
- Local business people; and
- Local government staff and councillors.

The focus group locations and participants were selected with the assistance of the project Advisory Group (AG). As well as utilising the recommendations of members of the AG, the research team accessed local community directories and invited members of a range of local groups living in and near each focus group location to participate in the focus group.

Focus group discussions were held in Colac, Warrnambool, Mortlake, Heywood, Coonawarra, Lucindale, Horsham and Beaufort, during the week of September 11-14<sup>th</sup>. In total, 57 people participated in the eight focus groups.

### **Latest project developments**

During August and September, we continued to seek additional funding for the project. Two new organisations committed funding to the project: the Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority and the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority. The project team is looking forward to having representatives of both organisations join the project Steering Committee.

We are continuing to seek additional funding for the project. The high level of interest in the study, and wide range of suggestions for what could be examined as part of the study, mean that additional funding could be usefully used to broaden the scope of the study to examine additional types of land use change, and a wider

range of potential socio-economic impacts of land use change.

### **What's coming up in the project?**

The next steps for the research team are to analyse the information from the focus groups, and use it as the basis for proposing the research questions to be studied in the project. The research questions will identify:

- which types of land use the study should examine, and
- of the many types of social and economic impacts these land use changes may have, which will be focussed in the study.

The detailed research plan currently being developed will be presented to the December meetings of the Advisory Group and Steering Committee for discussion and review. At this point the land use changes to be included in the study will be decided, together with the types of socio-economic impacts to be focussed on in different parts of the project.

While it would be ideal to be able to study every type of land use change, and every type of impact these changes may have, we can only do a certain amount with the level of funding available to the project. Our goal is to study the issues of greatest relevance to the communities living in the study region.

### *Project website*

We expect that during December the project website will be finalised and go online. The website will provide the opportunity for interested people to give feedback on land use changes and the impacts of these in their local areas.

**For further information, or to unsubscribe from these updates, please contact:**

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