

19 March 2010



SUBMISSION TO THE REGIONAL FOREST ASSESSMENT FOR THE SOUTH WESTERN CYPRESS STATE FORESTS

Introduction about Narrandera

Centrally located in the NSW Riverina region, Narrandera is 95 kilometres to the north-west of Wagga Wagga; approximately 84 kilometres south-east of Griffith and some 30 kilometres south east of Leeton. Importantly the National Highways linking Adelaide with Sydney (Sturt Highway) and Melbourne with Brisbane (Newell Highway) intersect at Narrandera.

At the last Census, Narrandera Shire had a population of 6013. Of this 21.4% of the population were children aged between 0-14 years, and 31.5% were persons aged 55 years and over. The median age of persons in Narrandera (A) (Local Government Area) was 42 years, compared with 37 years for persons in Australia. Close to 10% of the population are listed as indigenous.

In the last twenty (20) years Narrandera has experienced an adverse decline in Government employment. The loss of this employment has had a severe impact on the local economy which is still being felt today. Major Government industries that included Telstra and State Rail services either downsized or relocated. This resulted in job losses and relocation for many Narrandera families. The loss of job opportunities has seen a continual decline in the overall population and departure of young people at the conclusion of their High School studies.

The migration of our young people to regional cities and coastal towns is a major concern for Narrandera and other small towns in the region. Investment in projects that will help retain our youth is important to the long term survival of small towns and their industries. The social needs of community are also enhanced when families can retain close connections with their family members.



Response to Terms of References

Impacts of Drought and Climate Change on the Forests and Communities:

The major industries in Narrandera are farming and agriculturally based most of which have been severely impacted by the continual drought. Grants Holdings Pty Ltd, as a timber industry, is one of three major industry employers in the Narrandera Shire. Other industries being the Rockdale Feedlot, and the Manildra Flour Mill. All these industries, as well as providing local employment, are export industries and are critical for the Narrandera local economy. Grants Sawmill, in combination with their Condobolin operations, employees some fifty (50) staff. The timber produced by the mill is for the building and flooring industries. The business has invested in equipment that provides high standard flooring for the Japanese market and is commencing to make inroads into the Chinese market.

The eight (8) year drought has had severe implications for the Narrandera local economy both through the loss of jobs and less flow on spending for local business services. This has mostly been affected from farm operations, particularly as Narrandera, in the main, is a dry land farming community. The Rockdale Feedlot operations have experienced a 50% downturn in employment and operations resulting in a major negative impact for both the Narrandera and Leeton Shires. Noting that in full operation this industry employed 500 people and operated on a 24 hour seven day a week basis. The drought has caused less feed to be available and hence less cattle are available.

The irony of the drought conditions, however, for the growth and production of the native cypress pine, has seen this timber thrive in combination with the dry climate and sandy soil that surrounds Narrandera.

Opportunities for Ongoing and future Employment within Affected Communities:

As indicated in this submission the closure of operations for Grants Sawmill, as a major local employer, would have a devastating affect on the Narrandera community. Narrandera is an ageing and declining population, it would be severely impacted through the loss of some 35 jobs from the Narrandera Timber Mill. Given the demographics, and the mainly older workforce, it could be presumed that these people would be placed on long term unemployment with little local future job prospects resulting in families relocating and a further decline in the Narrandera population.

Ultimately the loss of the timber industry jobs would have a negative flow-on impact to businesses providing local services. The flow on impact would also affect Schools, medical and Hospital services, independent supermarket and even Council services.

Opportunities for Indigenous involvement

Narrandera is part of the Wiradjuri tribal region. The indigenous population is close to 10% of the total population. The aboriginal culture has close links with the land and in most cases the indigenous population are reluctant to relocate due to these close links.

Narrandera Shire Council, in conjunction with the Murrumbidgee Catchment Authority, operates a riparian program that is indigenous focussed and teaches skills in the areas of conservation and land management. Grants Timber Mill employees a number of indigenous workers and it is in the areas of work associated with the land that members of the indigenous community are most comfortable and ideally suited.

Many of the skills being taught in the Riparian project would assist indigenous workers to gain employment in the timber or farming industries.

Conclusion

The Narrandera community is in need of support. It has been severely affected by previous industry decline and the ongoing drought. The irony of the current drought situation is that the native cypress pine thrives in the dry sandy environment. Grants Timber Mill is a large local employer that has a current 20 year wood supply agreement to harvest the cypress pine.

Climate change impacts and associated reforms have a heavy focus on environmental demands that are ostensibly detrimental to the farming and agricultural industries that Narrandera community is dependent upon.

The Narrandera Shire Council believes that there is an urgent need for a whole of government approach for the development of a strategic focus that provides environmental cooperative reforms but also gives greater consideration to the impact of these reforms upon regional and local communities, together with providing certainty and future for the community.

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