

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

Subproject 3: Understanding shifts in the landholder population

Methods

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1. Introduction

This document outlines the methods proposed for a small research subproject that will examine the shifts in landholder population that result from changing land use to farm and plantation forestry. This study is Subproject 3 (SP3) of a broader study examining socio-economic impacts of land use change in the Green Triangle and Central Victoria (the 'Land Use Change' project). Subproject 1 (SP1) of the study examines community attitudes towards land use change of various types in the study region, while Subproject 2 (SP2) aims to profile and analyse relationships between different types of land use and socio-economic change in the study region.

2. Research aim and scope

2.1 Research aims

The principle goals of SP3 are to understand:

- (a) The impact of land use change to farm and plantation forestry on rural populations, through directly identifying the extent and nature of changes in population resulting from this type of land use change; and
- (b) The impacts of the shift to farm and plantation forestry on the landholders who change land use.

A secondary goal is to better understand the factors influencing the decision to change land use to farm and plantation forestry.

2.2 Research scope

This subproject was developed as part of the Land Use Change project after an initial review of issues discussed in the region, and of recent studies examining land use change issues. This review identified that concerns over the impacts of plantation forestry on rural population were a key issue being debated in the study region and more broadly in other regions around Australia. Some believe that expansion of plantation forestry has led to an increase in the rate of rural population decline in the study region; others believe there has been no impact.

Initially, consideration was given to developing a subproject which would identify the population impacts of a number of different types of land use change. However, the current funding available for SP3 is \$22,000. This enables only a small study to be undertaken, examining only one type of land use change. A larger study comparing land uses would require considerably higher funding than is available.

The decision to focus on studying land use change to farm and plantation forestry in SP3 (rather than the other land use changes being focused on in SP1 and SP2) was made for the following reasons:

- As described above, there is not enough funding to undertake a broader study, so only one land use change could be studied;
- Plantation forestry was identified as the highest priority land use change to be studied in the region in a series of group interviews held in September 2006; and
- It is feasible to survey landholders who have changed land use to plantation forestry as their contact details can be obtained via the plantation industry. It is more difficult to identify a sample frame for other types of land use change.

2.3 Types of plantation forestry to be studied

In the study region, land use change to plantation forestry occurs via:

- Purchase of agricultural land by plantation forestry businesses;
- Lease of agricultural land by plantation forestry businesses;
- Self-funded farm forestry - landholders establishing commercial tree crops on their property independently of the plantation industry. Some may receive some grants or assistance.

Additionally, a small number of joint ventures were established between plantation businesses and landholders in the 1980s (in which each took a share of returns on harvesting of the tree crop). Joint ventures of this type have not typically used in the region over the past 10-15 years and are not proposed to be studied.

Many landholders plant trees for non-commercial purposes on their properties. This will not be studied as part of SP3, as the primary goal of this subproject is to identify if land use change to commercial plantation forestry results in shifts in population in rural areas. The planting of non-commercial trees on part of a property is not generally believed to be associated with population change or its flow-on effects as it typically involves planting trees on a small proportion of a property, which is often marginal for agricultural production.

A similar argument could be used to exclude self-funded farm forestry from the study. Perceptions of self-funded farm forestry are generally that it involves no change in farm population. This perception has been reported in several previous studies including Mutch and Hutchison (1979) in Scotland; CFPLM (1989), Tonts *et al.* (2001) and Schirmer (2002) in Australia; and Cossalter and Pye-Smith (2003) in an international review of plantation related issues. This view was also expressed in the group interviews held in the study region in September 2006.

However, self-funded farm forestry is undertaken for commercial purposes. Further, it is sometimes argued that farm forestry is preferable to large-scale plantation forestry because it is believed to have fewer negative impacts on rural population levels (Schirmer 2002).

It is therefore useful to include farm forestry in the study as well as larger scale plantation forestry, to test the common perception that farm forestry has a smaller impact on rural population than larger-scale plantation forestry.

Therefore the study will focus on three types of land use change to farm and plantation forestry:

- Purchase of land by plantation businesses;
- Lease of land by plantation businesses; and
- Self-funded farm forestry.

3. Research design

While various methods can be used to understand *why* landholders choose to shift land use, this project aims to quantify the types of population change that result from land use change to farm and plantation forestry. Achieving this requires using methods that can gather quantitative data.

Therefore this study will utilise a postal questionnaire to survey a sample of landholders who have shifted land use to plantation forestry in recent years. This will enable quantification of the direct population change resulting from this type of land use change, and provide a basis for estimating likely indirect, or flow-on, impacts.

Qualitative interviews will be used to help identify key issues and topics to be included in the questionnaire, and provide context for better understanding how different landholders have made the decision to change land use.

The research design involves the following components, each of which is described in more detail in the following sections:

- Survey question design (Feb-Apr 2007) drawing from a literature review, data from group interviews, semi-structured interviews with landholders, and survey testing;
- Sample frame design & sampling (Feb-Apr 2007);
- Survey delivery (Apr-Jun 2007); and
- Survey analysis (Jul-Sep 2007).

3.1 Survey question design

Survey question design will comprise four stages:

Stage 1: Identifying topics to be included in the survey

This stage has been completed and the topics identified are included in Appendix 1. This initial stage involved identifying the perceptions reported by participants in eight group interviews held in the study region in September 2006¹. The group interviews were transcribed and analysed to identify key themes. As discussed earlier, this resulted in the decision to focus on studying land use change to plantation forestry for SP3. The content of the interviews included several comments on perceptions of impacts plantation expansion has had on landholders and on rural populations. These were used to develop the initial list of survey topics to be explored, which is provided in Appendix 1. These topics are currently being reviewed and commented on by members of the Steering Committee and Advisory Group that advise on the overall Land Use Change project (for details of the roles of these groups, see the 'Project Governance' section of the project website at http://www.crcforestry.com.au/Land_Use_Change).

Stage 2: Semi-structured interviews with landholders

While broad topics have been identified for the survey to focus on, more specific data are needed to design survey questions around these topics. In Appendix 1, key gaps

¹ The group interview process used is described in detail in the documents describing SP1 and SP2 and details of the group interview questions, locations and results are not included in this document to avoid repetition.

are identified where more information is needed to design appropriate questions for the survey.

More specific data that can inform question design will be gathered by undertaking semi-structured qualitative interviews with eight landholders who have shifted land use to plantation forestry, aiming to interview at least two who have changed land use from agriculture to plantation forestry via each of farm forestry, lease and land sale, as well as two interviews with plantation businesses who now manage leased or purchased land.

Each interviewee will be asked to discuss the survey topics listed in Appendix 1, describing how they would answer these broad questions. Interviews will be transcribed and analysed, with the analysis providing the basis for designing the initial draft questionnaire.

Stage 3: Design and initial review of draft survey

A draft survey will be designed, and commented on by members of the Advisory Group and Steering Committee (many of whom are landholders who can provide useful feedback on how easily questions can be answered). It will then be revised.

Stage 4: Survey testing and final survey revision

The revised survey will be tested by distributing it to a small sample of landholders who will complete it. Their answers will be examined to identify if questions have been misinterpreted or need redesign, and a final revision of the survey will be undertaken.

3.2 Sample frame design

As is discussed in detail in Appendix 1, achieving the desired outcomes of SP3 requires a survey of both:

- the original landholders prior to a shift to plantation forestry; and
- the new landholders/residents of plantation properties (e.g. plantation companies, residents renting houses).

In some cases these two will be the same; in others (particularly where land use change involved change in ownership of land) they will be different. Surveying both previous landholders and new landholders will ensure that all shifts in population can be identified, as a new landholder may have chosen to rent a house on the property, or to make other changes that affect the number and type of people living on a property that has been established to plantation.

To achieve an appropriate sample frame, it is therefore necessary to identify landholders prior to and post land use change for each of the purchase, lease and farm forestry modes used when changing land use to plantation forestry.

Table 1 details how a sample frame of the different types of landholders will be developed, and proposed methods of accessing contact details for different groups of landholders.

The first step in developing a sample frame is to identify the types of information needed in the sample frame. For this study, information is needed on:

- The *number of properties* purchased, leased or established to farm forestry, ideally by year in which land use change occurred to enable surveying

landholders who have lived with the land use change for differing periods of time;

- The *number of landholders* who changed land use, by type of farm/plantation forestry. This requires identifying number of landholders who managed land before and after the land use change. The number of landholders may be different to the number of properties, as some landholders may have leased or sold multiple properties at various points in time. Again, information on the year in which land use change occurred should be identified if possible; and
- The location of properties and landholders involved. Ideally, the number of properties/landholders involved in changing land use would be identified to the statistical local area (SLA) level or smaller scales where possible. This will enable spatial variance to be analysed as part of the survey.

These three types of data are readily accessed for purchased or leased land, as plantation companies can supply information on the year in which land was purchased or leased and how many properties were purchased or leased in each year. However, it will be more challenging to develop a sample frame for farm forestry as there are no simple sources of information available.

Once the sample frame of landholders and number and distribution of properties are known, an appropriate sample can be identified from the sample frame. While the exact numbers likely to be an appropriate sample are not known, based on initial advice from plantation companies, it is unlikely that in any one year:

- More than 60 properties have been purchased in the study region;
- More than 40 properties have been leased in the region.

It is likely that a sample frame will be able to be identified for:

- The past three years for land purchase (2004, 2005, 2006);
- The past 15 years for land lease; and
- A wide range of years for farm forestry, with some members of farm forestry networks having recently established farm forestry while others began establishing farm forest 2-3 decades ago.

Based on these estimates, it is likely that a total sample of 150-200 landholders will be surveyed in the Green Triangle and Central Victoria region with a relatively large sample used due to the relatively small number in the sample frame, and the need to adequately sample the three groups identified (lease, purchase and farm forestry) as well as to identify an appropriate sample of those changing land use at different points in time and in different parts of the study region.

Table 1: Identification of sample frame and methods for contacting landholders to be surveyed

Type of landholder	How will the sample frame be identified?	How will landholders contact details be accessed?
Landholder who has sold a property to a plantation business.	Via (a) plantation businesses, who typically maintain contact with landholders for 2-3 years after the property is sold, and (b) if feasible, real estate agents.	Both plantation companies and real estate agents are bound by confidentiality constraints which mean they cannot provide the names of clients to outside parties unless strict confidentiality agreements are entered into. In some cases, they may be unable to provide the names of landholders directly to researchers at all. To ensure these constraints are respected: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where possible, the plantation company/real estate agent and researcher will enter into an agreement on how contact details will be accessed by the researcher, enabling name and address details to be accessed directly by the researcher; • Where this is not possible, the plantation companies and real estate agents will be asked to forward surveys to landholders on behalf of the researchers, ensuring the researchers do not have access to contact details.
Landholder who has leased part or all of their property to a plantation business.	Via plantation businesses who pay landholders regular lease payments and therefore maintain up to date contact details for these landholders.	As above, plantation companies will be asked to forward survey on the researcher's behalf if they are unable to supply contact details directly to the researcher. Where this occurs, details of how many surveys have been posted to landholders in different LGAs will be recorded to ensure sample sizes are known.
Plantation business that has purchased a property	Contact has already been made with all plantation companies who purchase land in the region.	Each company will be asked to complete a survey for any properties they have purchased which have been included in the sample (in other words, the sample will be based on properties with the previous and new landholders surveyed for each of the properties sampled).
Farm forestry	Local farm forestry networks	This is the most difficult group to contact, as landholders may choose to independently establish farm forestry without joining any type of local group. However, farm forestry networks are in operation in the region and provide a means of contacting at least some landholders who have established farm forestry. It will not be possible to establish a comprehensive sample frame for this category, as there are no accessible databases enabling identification of all farm foresters.

3.3 Survey delivery

An adapted form of the Dillman Total Design Method (Dillman 2007) will be utilised in which the survey will:

- be printed in a B5 booklet with the questions designed to be easy to follow and answer;
- be mailed together with a postage paid self-addressed envelope for survey return;
- be accompanied by a personalised letter encouraging survey return;
- be accompanied by a letter of support signed by representatives of the project Advisory Group and Steering Committee, to improve recipient confidence in the usefulness and reputable nature of the survey;
- be followed by posting weekly reminders to survey recipients for two weeks, posting a second copy of the survey to non-responders, followed by posting up to three more weekly reminder cards; and
- include information for a 1800 free-call number survey recipients can call to receive advice on the survey.

This process has consistently achieved 50-70% response rates from Australian landholders and natural resource managers in the agricultural, fishing and forest industries (e.g. Byron *et al.* 2004a,b; Schirmer and Pickworth 2005). It is a modified form of the process recommended by Dillman (2007) in that instead of having a pre-survey letter followed by a survey, both are posted together. This has been chosen as the pre-survey letter is designed for use with random samples of the general population, whereas targeted surveys of a specific population known to have undertaken a particular activity appear to respond equally well to the combined posting of an introductory letter and survey as they do to these being posted separately. This modified form allows for up to six reminders to be posted after the posting of the initial survey, with some flexibility depending on the response rate achieved after each reminder. For example, if response rates are higher after three reminders, further reminders may not be needed; if they are low a higher number of reminder cards can be used to increase response rates (see Byron *et al.* 2004a,b).

This survey process is designed based on researchers having postal details for the people they are surveying, rather than posting surveys via a third party e.g. plantation companies. If surveys are posted via a third party, then sending regular reminders to non-responders may be difficult.

If surveys are posted on the researcher's behalf by plantation companies, this approach will require some modification. The options for modification are to:

- Allow the plantation companies to know who has returned a survey, by using a survey numbering system, and ask them to post on reminder cards to landholders who have not returned a survey. If this option is used, it is important to ensure that only a designated person at the plantation company handles survey delivery, and that they are fully informed and agree to respect the privacy of the landowners being surveyed by not disclosing information about (a) who has been posted the survey, or (b) who has chosen to complete the survey; or

- Send reminder cards via plantation companies to all landholders irrespective of whether they have returned a survey or not, so that companies are not given information on who has and has not returned surveys. This has the disadvantage of creating a nuisance for landholders who have already returned surveys.

The first option is preferred, and the Australian National University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) has been asked to consider this approach and give approval to its use in this study.

3.4 Survey analysis

Survey data will be analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences. The analysis will focus on producing data:

- Comparing the population living on properties before and after land use change to plantations and identifying if the patterns observed are different for purchase, lease and farm forestry;
- Identifying the different motivations landholders have for changing land use to plantations, and if particular motivations are associated with particular types of population change; and
- Identifying how satisfied landholders are with their decision to change land use.

Consideration will be given to including questions which ask the respondent to rate not just their own satisfaction with the land use change, but the satisfaction of other members of their household. This would enable a broader understanding of how land use change may impact on different members of the households affected. This will be explored further in semi-structured interviews held with landholders to identify if practicable questions can be designed that enable this information to be evaluated. Key constraints with asking questions about multiple members of a household include that further HREC approval beyond that currently applied for will be required if respondents under the age of 18 are asked to answer questions in the survey.

The demographic characteristics of respondents will be compared to the averages for landholders/rural residents in the same region to identify if there are any differences (for example, some have suggested that those choosing to sell land for plantations are older than the average landholder).

The results will be compared to data on rural population change for the regions surveyed which is being produced as part of Subproject 2.

4. Ethical issues

An Ethics application was submitted to the Australian National University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) for this study on February 2nd, and the HREC will advise on February 23rd any changes required to the study to meet ethics approval. The main ethical issues are:

- Ensuring confidentiality of participants: This has been discussed in Table 1 when methods for accessing landholder contact details were outlined. In addition to ensuring landholder contact details are accessed in an ethical manner, no individuals will be identifiable in the reported results, with data from different survey returns aggregated to ensure confidentiality is maintained;
- Ensuring participation is voluntary: Landholders participating in the survey will be informed that they can withdraw from the study at any time if they wish, up to the point of analysed data being published in reports;
- Ensuring landholders can receive results: The survey will include a section in which landholders can provide their contact details if they wish to be sent a copy of project results; and
- Ensuring participants are adequately informed: An information sheet explaining the nature of the project will be sent to participants together with the survey, and will include contact details for the researchers (including a 1800 Freecall number they can call to obtain further information), as well as for the HREC if they wish to raise any concerns about the research.

5. References

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Appendix 1: Proposed survey topics

A1.1 Identification of topics: methods

A literature review (largely drawing from the comprehensive review of topics undertaken by Schirmer *et al.* 2005a,b) was initially used to identify key topics around which there may be information gaps. From the literature review, it was apparent that there are a wide range of perceptions about the impact of plantation expansion on rural populations and on landholders who choose to shift land use, including the following varying views that land use change to plantation forestry leads to:

- landholders moving off the land and into towns some distance away;
- landholders retiring to local town centres;
- landholders remaining on the property, particularly when it is leased;
- new people shifting in to rent houses on plantation properties;
- social change resulting from a change in who lives on properties;
- empty houses being demolished or left unoccupied on plantation properties;
- landholders being enabled to purchase better farming properties;
- landholders being enabled to ‘retire with dignity’ as they have received a good price for their land; and/or
- landholders being forced off the land because they have no other options but to sell to plantation companies.

Additionally, there is a clear linkage in many arguments about population, with loss or growth of population generally conceptualised as having a number of flow on effects on a rural community’s service provision and community life.

This list shows some clear conflicts in perceptions held by different groups about the impacts of land use change to farm forestry and plantations on landholders.

In the group interviews, a similar range of perceptions was identified, although not as detailed as that provided above. The following quotes represent the range of views expressed in the group interviews (quotes are drawn from four of the eight group discussions held):

...a lot of property has been sold out to bluegums and the population is dropping rapidly.

... when the pine trees first started coming into the area ... it was providing an outlet for a lot of farmers who were sick of banging their heads against a gate post trying to make a living out of wool that wasn’t very viable and so the foresters came in and bought up a lot of land.

(discussing why bluegums have expanded): ... I just don’t think the generation was there to come along to take over. If you don’t have that and you are getting old, yes and somebody offers you money and you sell out.

Can I add something to the bluegums that have affected places like [X] and those towns up there, taking the whole community away and so like those towns, and I use

the term dying because there is no one outside, there is probably not enough people for the fire brigade let alone anything else. And all those people all want to come into town ... There is a whole breakdown of society due to an influx of one type of development and that sort of thing and it doesn't need a lot of people to run its bluegums.

it allowed a lot of people to get out ... people bailed out and got a lot of dough and it allowed a lot of people to get out. Probably in some places there were some big properties went in trees ... but there were a lot of little ones too that perhaps you would argue perhaps weren't viable. A lot of the old soldier settlers blocks you know. ... It has allowed some people to shift on, whether that's good or bad I am not here to argue.

Based on the perceptions identified, a set of research questions were identified which would need to be answered to provide information on the different perceptions recorded:

- Research question 1: Has changing land use to plantations resulted in a change in the number of people living on the properties on which land use changed? If yes, what magnitude of change?
- Research question 2: Has changing land use to plantations resulted in a change in who lives on the land, regardless of whether this involves a shift in overall numbers of people?
- Research question 3: If landholders have shifted off a property after land use change to plantations, where have they gone and what employment do they now have?
- Research question 4: What factors motivate landholders to change land use to farm/plantation forestry?
- Research question 5: How satisfied are landholders with their decision to change land use?

The initial scoping of survey topics identified a need to have two sections to the survey:

- Questions about the number of people who lived and worked on the property *prior* to the land use change; and
- Questions about the number of people who lived and worked on the property *after* the land use change.

In some cases, the same landholders will complete both parts of the survey; in others the survey will need to be completed by two parties – those who managed the land before and those who managed to land after the land use change. The latter case is likely to mostly occur in cases of land purchase for plantations. The discussion of sample frame design below identifies how these different groups of landholders will be surveyed.

A1.2 Survey topics and information required to further develop questions

Table A1 below identifies the broad survey topics identified from the literature review and group interviews conducted to date. As described in detail in the main body of

this document, these topics will be refined based on undertaking qualitative interviews of landholders who have changed land use to plantation and farm forestry, and will be revised further after formal testing of the survey on a small sample of landholders.

Further information which will specifically be sought from qualitative interviews with landholders is identified in the table.

Table A1: Survey topics identified and further information needed

Survey topic	Further information needed to inform design of survey questions
<i>Section 1: To be completed by landholders who managed land prior to land use change to farm or plantation forestry</i>	
What was the land used for prior to being established to plantation (including land uses for the five years prior to plantation establishment, with multiple land uses able to be identified)	Types of land uses to be included in multiple category questions
How many people were living on the property prior to land being established to plantation (ideally identifying the number during the 5 years prior to plantation establishment)?	
Characteristics of people living on the property prior to land being established to plantation (e.g. age, on-farm and off-farm employment)	
How many people were employed on the property prior to the land use change (whether they lived on or off the property)	
What proportion of income of the landholding household was made from the land prior to it being established to plantation?	Identify most appropriate means of asking this question – i.e. is % of household income or of property income most relevant (or both)?
What factors influenced the decision to change land use to plantation forestry?	A number of factors will be identified through qualitative interviews and used to construct multiple choice questions
If land was sold, how long had it been on the market before being sold to a plantation business?	
What proportion of total land holdings was established to plantation?	
Did people living on the property shift after establishment to plantation?	
If yes, where? What occupation do they now have? If people shifted off the land, what local community groups/organisations had they participated in locally prior to the shift of land use to plantation and are they still members of these organisations?	
How satisfied are the landholders with the decision to establish the land to plantation?	Dimensions of satisfaction will be identified so that the question can be

Survey topic	Further information needed to inform design of survey questions
	phrased reasonably broadly if necessary
Demographic characteristics of the respondents (e.g. age, gender, income)	
<i>Section 2: To be completed by landholders who managed land after land use change to farm or plantation forestry</i>	
Since land use change to plantations, have there been changes to the infrastructure on the property (houses, fences, sheds etc)?	
Since land use change to plantations, have (a) previous residents remained on property or (b) have new residents shifted to live on the property?	
If new residents have shifted to live on the property, is this via subdivision and sale, or rental of housing?	Other appropriate categories to be identified from interviews
What area of the property was established to plantation, and are there other land uses on the property e.g. stock agistment?	Relevant land uses to be identified from interviews
<p>For new residents of properties: Demographic characteristics (age, gender)</p> <p>Where have they come from?</p> <p>Where are they employed?</p> <p>Extent of involvement in local community groups/organisations?</p>	In interviews, the extent to which these types of questions could be answered by new land managers will be determined and questions framed accordingly.