Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation

Preliminary Research Proposal Format

Project Title (10 words maximum):	Key Strategy/Key R&D Issue Addressed:
Reforesting Central Victoria: Social environmental sensitivities	**Investigate rural social issues relating to rural communities in towns and farms**
RIRDC Sub-Program: **4.3 HUMAN CAPITAL, COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS**	Research Organisation: **School of Forestry, University of Melbourne/ and Wombat Forest Society**

ADMINISTRATION CONTACT DETAILS:

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OUTCOMES AND R&D OBJECTIVE/S

The main outcome will be readily available information on community views on acceptable types and strategies for reafforestation – that can be used by planning authorities in areas faced with pressure from investment / plantation industry to undertake rapid re-afforestation.

This information will enable local government and other planning authorities to make rational decisions about planning controls affecting their areas, and to avoid serious disruption of communities and adverse environmental effects.

BACKGROUND AND BENEFITS (Clearly identify economic, environmental and social benefits)

The recent completion of the Regional Forestry Agreement (RFA) process in Victoria has given rise to (1) serious questions about the adequacy of timber volume from native forests available for survival of the milling industry, and (2) the urgent need for a government strategy to support the existing timber industry sector – by providing a supplementary timber resources base that will ensure continuity of supply in the region surrounding native forests. The RFA for Central Victoria recommended plantation development around existing forests and the Victorian Government has plans to provide a $20M scheme to support 10 000 ha of reafforestation on rural land within 200 km of the Wombat Forest. While such a scheme could have obvious benefits for some sectors, there is serious community concern about the danger of such a rapid development causing adverse social, economic and environmental impacts in the region.

Central Victoria has seen many of the worst impacts of European settlement over the past 150 years. The impacts of massive deforestation and land degradation are severely impacting on the environmental and economic futures of the region. There is now broad recognition of the need to put trees back into the landscape. But it is imperative that the plans to reafforest be considered within the broader context of the environment, the region's hydrology, social impacts, salinity, carrying capacity , and not just the financially most expedient siting from the investor's perspective. There has been significant population growth, rapid development in tourism and the area lies at the headwaters of river systems that are heavily relied upon for irrigation – all aspects that require sensitivity in planning for land use change.

This proposal is for a research project that would provide critical information for sound planning of future re-afforestation in the Central Victorian region. The study is to be conducted jointly by the University of Melbourne research scientists with members of the Wombat Forest Society, who have shown considerable concern and leadership in canvassing and addressing community issues relating to utilisation of the Wombat Forest over the past 12 years.

The results will be reported in a form suitable for use Shires and by planning authorities in Central Victoria, and also in many other areas of Australia facing similar land use change, and lack of information.

PROJECT DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY (Including technology transfer and adoption)

The project will build on results of research on impacts on communities, environment and economy of the expansion of plantations in other areas of Victoria, Tasmania and W. Australia. The study will comprise four main stands of research;

1. Community attitudes - where and how do people see trees fitting into land use in their areas; What features of reafforestation do they oppose, and favour.
2. Socio- economic impacts - what are the likely effects of alternative afforestation plans on populations and community survival; including impacts on employment over the development of a plantation estate, and on traditional farming and tourism and the timber industry.
3. Likely effects of various reafforestation strategies on hydrology and water supplies in the region and beyond.
4. Spatial research using GIS and available data on land use in the region.

The community attitudes study will involve participatory rural appraisal, followed by more formal telephone surveys. The views of communities and various industry groups will be used to arrive at various alternative reafforestation strategies that are generally acceptable for the region.

The socio-economic study will define (and map) existing land use and economic indicators for the region. It will then estimate the impacts of each alternative reafforestation strategy determined above, on land use (farming areas), employment over the years, and on road/truck use and tourism.

In the third component, hydrologists will be contracted to make general comment on the likely impact of the alternative reafforestation strategies on hydrology, salinity and ground water availability in the region. No field work will be done, but existing studies used to extrapolate information.

The spatial and GIS study will relate the data collected on economic and social aspects of the region and peoples views of reafforestation – to spatial data on the region (using statistical local areas as units of analysis). The study will also produce maps and layers of other data on land and vegetation and land use, using aerial photography and other sources.

RESEARCH CAPABILITY AND EXPERIENCE:

R.J. Petheram is a specialist in both land use and participatory approaches to his rural research and development. He has recently managed a research project on socio-economic impact of land use change in W. Victoria, which involved coordination of research in four areas: – community views, economic impacts, future scenarios and stakeholder consultation.

Tim Anderson (President, Wombat Forest Society) has extensive experience of community participation in aspects relating to forest management in Central Victoria. His local knowledge and input on land and community issues will be essential in guiding the community attitude study and the GIS and other aspects of research. Tim is also involved in producing computer models (On CD Rom) that allow land use forecasting analysis to be accessible to the general public.

Consultants specialists will be contracted to undertake specific tasks for the research, i.e,

a) design of social studies including telephone survey techniques,
b) hydrology in the Central Victorian region
c) Economics and land use analysis
d) Modelling of alternative future scenarios
e) Spatial data analysis and GIS

APPLICATIONS TO OTHER SOURCES OF FUNDING: (For this and related proposals)

PRELIMINARY BUDGET (Exclusive of GST):

RIRDC	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	TOTAL $
SALARIES AND ON COSTS	[redacted]					[redacted]
TRAVEL	[redacted]					[redacted]
OPERATING	[redacted]					[redacted]
CAPITAL (EQUIPMENT)	[redacted]					[redacted]
RIRDC TOTAL						[redacted]
RESEARCH ORGANISATION	[redacted]					[redacted]
TOTAL OF INDUSTRY & IN-KIND CONTRIBUTIONS	[redacted]					[redacted]
PROJECT TOTAL	[redacted]					[redacted]