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## **COLAC OTWAY RURAL LAND USE STRATEGY**

### **Submission from TIMBER COMMUNITIES AUSTRALIA**

Timber Communities Australia (TCA) is a national grassroots community organisation representing timber workers, their families and businesses dependent on a viable sustainable timber industry. Nationally we have 82 branches throughout Australia with 14 Branches in Victoria. In the Otways we have the Otways Branch based in Colac.

Timber Communities Australia believes that through proper management of resources based on sound scientific reasoning rural towns reliant on forest generated industries can achieve prosperous economies and sustainable futures for generations to come.

With a long history as an area with plantations it is somewhat surprising that the shire is now setting policy that has the potential to severely obstruct and impede further plantation development.

The phasing out of the native hardwood sector in the Otways forest, set for 2008, will bring even more financial hardships and economic stresses on communities and businesses that have been built around the timber industry.

Plantations provide employment opportunities for many of the workers who will be effected by the native forest closure and will improve (if they are given room to grow) the economic wellbeing of communities in the area.

With limited employment opportunities industries such as the plantation timber industry should be encouraged to enable younger generations the chance to work in an industry that will enable them to remain in the shire.

As stated in the opening paragraphs of the report the shire recognizes the importance of the timber industry so why is it that most sections of this report relating to plantation development are negative to an industry that has the potential to be one of the shires biggest economic assets.

Both the food processing and timber processing sub sectors have strong growth potential over the next decade, with Colac Otway Shire well placed to capitalise on this growth. The likely end result is for greater wealth generation and overall contribution to the Shire's economy. As well, it presents opportunities for new enterprise creation in manufacturing support industries, particularly those involved with trades (maintenance and repairs and specialised training.)

The above statement is taken from the Shires manufacturing report 2004 and outlines the potential for the growth of the industry. Why is there such a major shift in the shires policy in light of the above statement?

Timber plantations established on farm land are simply a land use change. It is no different from a dairy farmer selling his land to a viticulturist. The only thing that is different that the crop that is being planted isn't harvested until they have been in the ground for a minimum 15 years and the crop being harvested tends to be somewhat bigger than traditional crops.

So why the concern with plantations? Agriculture through out Australia is undergoing major changes.

Farming is changing and the figures reflected in section 2.3 of the Strategy outline these trends quite clearly. Plantation forestry is providing a real opportunity for struggling farmers to sell or lease their land. Planning restrictions as proposed in the strategy will mean that dependent on where your farm lays within the strategy your land value can be severely lowered. It should be the right of the landowner to sell his land to whoever he wants and not the shire that dictates what is acceptable. If plantations were viewed as a land use change and another form of agriculture then the necessity for this strategy would be non existent.

It is not a "loss" of agricultural land when plantations are established. It is simply another crop. Plantations are compatible with other agricultural activities as most established plantations have other agricultural users as neighbors. The statement in section 8.4.2 page 53 *Council acknowledges that timber plantations (and their maintenance) can be incompatible with some adjoining land uses especially those associated with food production* TCA challenges the council to produce the evidence to back up this claim. If council goes down this path then it will have to undertake a study on the environmental impacts of every form of agriculture and produce factual information.

The assumptions that plantations are causing rural decline is dispelled in section 3.3 and again the question needs to be asked why is the shire so intent on restricting and impeding an industry that can provide real solutions for struggling farmers?

As stated in the report farming land has reduced by some 29000ha and plantations have only accounted for 4400ha.

All forestry activities are regulated by rules and regulations ranging form federal to local level. Suggestions in this report relating to the 'lack of regulation' are extremely misleading. The attempt to place further restrictions on plantations using council laws is not warranted and would become a costly process for both ratepayers and land owners when objections are raised.

Governments have a role in assisting their constituents whatever level of government. The proposed regulations are restrictive to the development of the plantation industry. Council is in effect denying their constituents the right of being part of an industry that can bring environmental, economic and social benefits to the shire.

As the State Manager for Timber Communities Australia I see to often the unnecessary strains and pressures put on people and communities that are reliant on the timber industry by zealot green groups and unwarranted government legislation. To put another level of regulation on existing regulations is unfounded and will inhibit and deter people from investing in plantations which in turn will mean a loss to the social and economic well being of local communities.

I would urge Council to carefully consider the ramifications to the people within its boundaries that are members of the timber industry if it follows the recommendations put forward in this strategy. With Federal and State governments now saying that plantation development is the way of the future it is alarming that a local government is trying to impede their growth.

Yours truly

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**Victorian State Manager**  
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