

What's happening in private forestry?

This newsletter is to inform you of recent developments relating to private forestry in our area and on the activities of the Northern Inland Forestry Investment Group (NIFIG)

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Name Change

We have changed the groups name from New England-North West to Northern Inland to better reflect our area of coverage.

The role of the group, which consists of landholders, foresters and government agency representatives (DIPNR, State Forests, NSW Agriculture, Greening Australia, State & Regional Development), is to assist the development of commercial private forestry activity in the region.

There are 7 such groups in NSW and 21 nationally. Collectively, they are now called Private Forestry Development Committees (PFDCs). Previously they were called Regional Plantation Committees (RPCs). The new name acknowledges their involvement in the management of existing private native forests as well as plantations.

New Funding Arrangements

Under a new round of State/Commonwealth funding, the NIFIG has funding to July 2004. We are expecting an announcement about ongoing funding in April/May 2004 for the 2004/05 financial year.

As in the past, our group is hosted by the New England-North West Regional Development Board and we have access to their facilities.

Our focus is still very much on promoting and nurturing the development of commercial private forestry in the region. The Commonwealth government has also asked for a greater emphasis on the natural resource management (NRM) benefits from forestry.

Native Vegetation Bill 2003

The new NSW Native Vegetation Bill passed through both houses of parliament in December 2003. When operational, this new legislation will have important implications for those operating sustainable private native forestry (PNF) activities.

At present, an exemption for PNF operations exists. Under the new legislation, this exemption will cease and landholders will require a Property Vegetation Plan (PVP) to operate an existing PNF activity or commence new PNF activity.

What is required in a PVP is not yet known, but discussions with DIPNR staff suggest it may be a simple document that basically indicates where the PNF activity is occurring and contains a declaration that the landholder will follow the PNF Code of Practice.

This Code of Practice (and other regulations regarding native vegetation) are still being developed and the new legislation will not become operative until these supporting codes/regulations are complete. A new working group has been set up in NSW to develop the code for PNF.

Catchment Management Authorities

Catchment Management Boards (CMBs) have been superseded by Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs). CMAs will have broad responsibility for NRM strategy and activity in our region. It has been suggested that they may have some regulatory and approval powers.

Since forestry can make a contribution to many NRM problems, we are currently developing a blueprint to help inform CMAs about the forestry options suitable to our region and to highlight issues which influence the commercial potential of private forestry.

We plan to work closely with the CMAs in our region to provide an informed voice on forestry and ensure the contribution to NRM of commercial forestry is recognised and rewarded.

Coombe11 Farm Forestry Course

Some of you attended this 2 day course on managing private forests for timber when it was held near Armidale. Many others have expressed interest in attending future courses.

Unfortunately, the FarmBis subsidy for the course was withdrawn late last year when FarmBis ran out of funds. Consequently, the course planned for October 2003 had to be cancelled.

The NIFIG is now investigating the possibility of paying the subsidy out of our own funds to make the course affordable to landholders. I will inform all interested parties if it becomes possible to hold another course.

Walcha Softwood Strategy

Last year, the NIFIG and Walcha Council funded the development of a strategy aimed at expanding the Walcha softwood estate from 10,000ha to 50,000ha, in order to achieve the critical mass required to attract additional timber processing activity to the region.

This strategy was launched to potential investors in Sydney and a number of interested parties have emerged.

The development of a softwood mill at Quirindi to make use of the existing State Forests pine resource around Walcha will add impetus to potential industry expansion.

Walcha Council has funded a Plantation Development Unit (PDU) within council to progress the softwood opportunity in the area. Despite the uncertainties of council amalgamations, we are hopeful that this initiative will continue.

PNF Case Study Farms

Our advisory forester John Brandis has been working with two case study farms in the region (near Ebor and Armidale) to develop PNF enterprises on those properties. The objective is to generate commercial examples of how PNF can be operated sustainably in our region and to provide a blueprint for others wishing to become involved in PNF.

It will also provide something of a test case for legislative procedures. The current state of uncertainty regarding the legislation has not helped our progress on these case studies, but we are persisting.

Farm Forestry Manual

The NIFIG is about to produce a farm forestry manual for this region. The manual draws together information from the numerous trials carried out in the region over recent years and makes recommendations on the most suitable species. It also has a very comprehensive section on the establishment and management techniques that are critical to farm forestry success in our area.

This manual will be available in the near future by contacting David Thompson at NIFIG.

Cypress Pine

We held a cypress pine field day and mobile sawmilling demonstration near Ashford last year. This revealed considerable interest amongst landholders in cutting saleable timber from cypress.

However, Greening Australia trials on cypress management suggest that the costs of thinning cypress to improve timber growth are prohibitive relative to the returns, even where additional grazing is achieved. The trials also showed the soil erosion benefits to be variable. The incentive then is to cut harvestable trees only and perform no thinning. This can lead to dense, overstocked cypress forests and a reduction in the timber growth and value.

This issue may be one where CMAs can provide incentives for improved forest management, combined with timber production and enhanced grazing.

Greening Australia have recently produced a revised booklet on cypress management which is available by contacting me, or Greening Australia in Armidale on (02) 6772 3248.

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If you have any questions relating to private forestry in our region, please do not hesitate to contact me.

David Thompson
Northern Inland Forestry Investment Group Project Manager
Mobile 0419 681 818.



Northern Inland Forestry Investment Group

New England—North West Regional Development Board
P O Box 1138
ARMIDALE NSW 2350

Phone: (02) 6771 3284
Fax: (02) 6771 3286
Email: nenwrdb@northnet.com.au