
Job title	Tintenbar to Ewingsdale	Job number
		84046
Meeting name & number	Agricultural Focus Group	File reference
		84046
Location	Bangalow Memorial RSL Hall	Time & date
		6:30pm 23 March 2005
Purpose of meeting	AFG 2	

Present	Shane Higgins Cathy Crawley Rose Boyd Claire Aman Cliff James Katrina Luckie Neville Alcorn Steve Barnier Shauna Boyle	Toby Heys Adam Beck Jo Walsh Rex Harris Bronwyn Weinert Rik Whitehead Robert Hood Pam Brooks
Apologies	Rebecca Zeinfeld Ian Duncan	Matthew Jamieson Don Priest
Circulation	Those present	

Prepared by Rose Boyd

Date of circulation 30 March 2005

Date of next meeting 9 May 2005

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1. Welcome and introductions

Adam Beck welcomed the AFG and project team to the meeting and introduced member Katrina Luckie, Executive Director of the Northern Rivers Regional Development Board. Speakers for the evening were introduced: Rik Whitehead (Department of Primary Industries, DPI), and Claire Aman (Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources, DIPNR).

For the benefit of those visiting or new to the AFG, the AFG members introduced themselves and outlined their key interests.

2. Notes of previous meeting

Matthew Jamieson submitted a comment regarding the AFG1 notes, stating that the notes were not a complete record of the meeting. Matthew asked that the minutes reflect the opinions of the meeting.

The AFG members agreed that the notes should reflect opinions stated at the meetings.

At this point, the notes will continue to be developed informally, with the opportunity for AFG members to comment specifically on the notes where they feel they do not reflect the opinions stated at the meetings.

The group accepted the minutes of the AFG1 as a true and correct record.

3. Presentation by Claire Aman – Northern Rivers Regional Development Board

Claire presented the findings of the *Farmland Protection Project*. The summary document entitled *Northern Rivers Farmland Protection Project, Summary: Final Recommendations 2005* has been attached. This document was distributed to AFG members at the meeting.

The background on the project is outlined below:

- Farmland Protection Project seeks to protect the region's important farmland from urban and rural residential development by mapping farmland and developing planning principles.
- The project aims to protect food-producing land for a range of agricultural industries that may be important currently or in the future that otherwise may be lost to urban and rural residential uses
- The project is funded by the North Rivers Catchment Management Authority. It is coordinated by DIPNR and involves a partnership between DIPNR and DPI, as well as input from farming groups and community.

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In relation to the land in the study area identified as state and regionally significant, they can not be rezoned for urban and rural residential development, unless already identified in relevant and agreed to settlement strategies.

In regard to Public Infrastructure: Public infrastructure is permitted on land mapped as state or regionally significant where no feasible alternative is available. Councils or state agencies proposing public infrastructure on such land should select alternative sites where possible.

Claire recommended that in relation to the proposed highway passing through state and regionally significant land that RTA should discuss/negotiate this with DIPNR.

However, DIPNR cannot preclude the RTA from building a road in these areas.

Following the presentation, Claire provided maps for the group to use to discuss regional and state significant land.

During the presentation, AFG members raised several key issues:

- The final DIPNR classifications provided by the project do not reflect the true horticultural/agricultural capacity of the area
- The mapping decision-makers do not understand the soil landscape capability as currently demonstrated in the existing landscape
- The existing macadamia groups should be consulted as they could provide relevant and valuable data.

Further clarification of the maps was offered:

- The mapping should be viewed as a tool to guide/limit future rural settlement in the area. It is not a determination of what land is necessarily good for all production purposes. For determining which land is suitable for a particular enterprise, information would need to be sought from horticulture experts in area.

Claire is able to post copy of maps to AFG.

Jo Walsh

4. **Rik Whitehead – Department of Primary Industries – Agricultural Land Classification**

Rik commented on the passion for agriculture expressed in the meeting, compared to other forums he has attended. In response, the AFG raised the concept of generational farmland as a factor in increasing the significance of farmland to this group.

Rik described the DPI land classification system as another way to describe land. As his PowerPoint presentation was unavailable at the meeting, Rik spoke to a handout on agricultural land classification that he distributed to the AFG. **Please note that for reference Rik's PowerPoint presentation intended for the meeting has been attached to these notes.**

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Classification was given for the study area:

33% of study area - *Class 3 - Grazing land or land well suited to pasture improvement. It may be cultivated or cropped in rotation with pasture. The overall production level is moderated because of odaphic or environmental constraints. Erosion hazard, soil structure breakdown and other factors including climate may limit the capacity for cultivation; and soil conservation or draining works may be required.*

70% of study area - *Class 4 – Land suitable for grazing but not for cultivation. Is based on native pastures or improved pastures established using minimum tillage techniques. Production may be seasonally high but the overall production level is low as a result of major environmental constraints.*

The above classification of the study area generated comments from those present:

- The classification is not accurate – Class 6 is more accurate: *Land which, because of a combination of climate and soil, is well suited to intensive production of a crop or a narrow range of crops whose special requirements limit their successful culture to such land. This class may include some lands formerly described as ‘unique’*
- The classification system lacks clarity
- Members did not agree with classification classes
- Classification did not reflect the nature of the land in the study area
- There was concern that mapping of area in relation to agriculture land classification would give an incorrect picture of the nature of the study area

The discussion resulted in further clarification:

- The agriculture land classification is a tool to assist in planning discussion and decisions. It is not mapped at a farm scale and therefore has limitations for purposes other than strategic planning
- Agriculture land classification is mainly determined on slope and ability to cultivate. Increasingly land now is assessed on its suitability for a particular type of enterprise, for example ‘good land for macadamias, good land for sugar etc.
- Any such mapping could be viewed as a first cut or assessment. Similar to threatened species databases for example, one needs to go to existing mapped data and then verify in the field including input of local knowledge.
- The AFG provides the forum to exchange information and build on information gathered by the project team. This forum is a constructive process, which allows the AFG to offer information to the project team.

Please note that for further information, the following relevant documents have been provided:

- *Agricultural Land Classification Study* – Byron Shire (JP Hindle; December 1999)
- *Ag Land Classification – Ag Fact AC 25* (Therese Hulme, Tom Grosskopf, John Hindle; 2002).

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5. Jo Walsh – Agricultural Land Use in study area

Jo tabled letters that were received from the Macadamia Society and Surrey Bogg. These letters will be forwarded to the AFG for their information. The letters provide information on macadamia production and value in the area. Rose Boyd

Jo was asked if she required a summary of cattle industry in the area. Jo indicated that she was developing a summary. She stated that beef cattle production is the largest single income for the Northern Rivers. Quantifying the value of beef production in the study area is difficult.

Jo is working with Bill Hoffman, DPI's Cattle Officer, to determine an estimate of farmgate value initially based on estimation of grazing land in study area. Many individual herds are managed by the Jarretts. Jo aims to document the arrangements and relationships between individual landholders and herd managers. Pending approval from the Jarretts, this would involve developing a case study on the Jarretts, which would provide a better understanding of beef cattle production in the study area.

Jo began an overview of agriculture in the study area, for example, area of study area, soil landscapes, soils, topography, climate, overview of Agriculture in Northern Rivers, employment, income, etc.

Jo has prepared an overview of major industries in the area including how many enterprise or hectares, nature of enterprises, establishment and operation cost, gross margins, production issues etc.

The members said they would be willing to organise information for the land use study and requested further guidance on the level of data required. Members of AFG offered to provide information and review information already gathered. Joanne to organise to provide information to members. Jo Walsh

It was stressed by the AFG that reports need to be accurate before being sent to government decision makers.

6. Next meeting

The next meeting will be held Monday 9 May 2005. Shane Higgins will provide an update on the program and key milestones at that meeting. Shane Higgins

The meeting ended at 8:30pm.