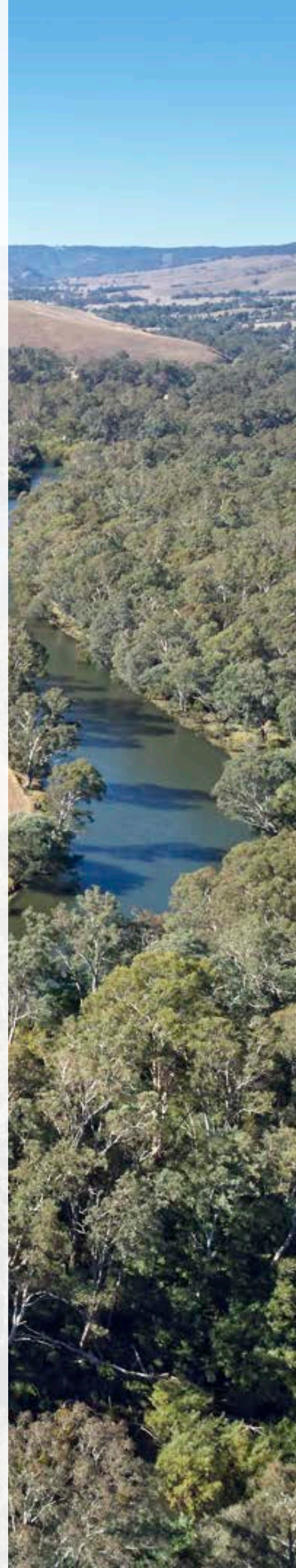




SHAPING
MURRINDINDI'S
FUTURE

Farm Forestry

**Primary Industry
Entrepreneurial
Discovery Process**





Summary

A full day workshop in Farm Forestry was held on Monday 5 February 2024 at the Taggerty Hall. The workshop supported using the Quad-Helix model, with participants ranging in experience and expertise across industry, government, research, and community.

The aim of this workshop was to define the asset further, and link potential opportunities that will create social and economic benefit within the community. A range of opportunities were discussed, with the group unanimously agreeing that Farm Forestry should progress to Stage 3 – Innovation Working Groups.

Farm forestry presents a promising opportunity to revitalize the local forestry sector while providing economic, social, and environmental benefits. Small and medium-scale plantations on farming land can diversify income sources for farmers by producing timber, firewood, carbon offset credits, eucalyptus oils, and native foods.



Key Assets

The district has extensive local forestry expertise and farmers interested in mixed hardwood plantations for the multiple benefits. A key asset is the abundance of available farming land and a willingness within the community to diversify their farming enterprises to include trees, livestock, food production, soil nutrition and improve biodiversity values.

Education and research is already happening in the corridor and other local areas such as Benalla, trialling various mixed hardwood plantations assessing growth rates, viability, and improvements to the timber quality. The current climate, rainfall, soil type and location all contribute to the key assets.



Strategic Competitive Advantage

There is a strong network of researchers and scientists in this field, with farm forestry groups focused on addressing the current hardwood timber shortages while planning for future sustainability.

Work is already being done by Murrindindi Climate Network who have hosted multiple educative farm forestry field days with good attendance. Access to small scale harvesting equipment and machinery across the state to selectively fell trees on small plantations is limited and there is potential to sell / hire and share this equipment locally.

There is a strong future competitive market for high quality hardwood timber and firewood and a large hardwood manufacturing business (Ryan and McNulty) within 120km of Alexandra.



Key Challenges

One key challenge will be ensuring there is no increased fire risk to community by keeping the plantations small scale and scattered.

There are challenges associated with clearing and felling of plantations that have become habitat areas, although more of a risk on the larger longer term established plantations. Future climate change projections estimate that extreme rainfall events will be more intense and more variable and will decrease in the average yearly rainfall. Maximum and minimum daily temperatures will continue to increase over this century (Goulburn Climate Projections 2019).

Loss of prime farming land used for sheep and cattle will need to be considered. The high cost of initial investment and ongoing maintenance paired with slow plantation growth rates and return on investment are further challenges to be considered.



Workshop Discussion

Local CoP/ Murrindindi Institute Forestry

There is opportunity for an Education and Training Hub to be established within Murrindindi showcasing experience and knowledge in the field of Farm Forestry. This hub has potential to provide industry advice and education, create incentives for new growers, develop training Certificate Courses and apprenticeships and a system of assessing skills and to share production plans/ machinery within the network.

Develop Commercial Markets

An assessment should be conducted initially to assess current markets and success/failings with an aim to double capacity within 10 years (2000HA established by 2034). Murrindindi could become industry leaders in Farm Forestry. Develop regional assurance scheme certification, to determine the quality, monitor and verify plantations, and assist with branding and marketing. Murrindindi could produce unique and niche products from local growers.



Seed bank/ collection

Take an ecosystem approach- focusing on seed to final product and creating diversification in the species grown and produced.

Policy and Regulations

Creating better stability in Governance with planning and regulations and the lifetime asset realised. Community Carbon exchange to offset emissions. Indigenous land use, monitoring and reporting economic value/ environment benefit, bushfire regulations and fire management overlays, Victorian climate change strategy, Farm Forestry policy within Government, and inclusion to the National Forestry Plan.

Forestry Funding Bank

Specialised loans to encourage new establishment of plantations on a variety of properties. Support for a future fund/sponsor scheme, with incentives locally and from State Government to assist with vacant land and suitability testing. Carbon Credits for set up costs- is a challenging process currently.



Renewable Energy Projects

A number of jointly owned projects could include pyrolysis plant, milling/ peeling, manufacturing of oils/ bio extractives, kiln drying, seed collection – food/ tree, carbon credits, agronomy, biochar and a range of other new products.

Infrastructure Requirements

These could include a nursery/ seed bank, hub or research centre, mill for processing if not mobile (could utilise existing sites), sale of product, pest control, weed control and fire prevention, roads and access – heavy vehicle.

Logistics

It is important to understand the current and predicted market which includes site establishment, the early cash flow, improvements to soil/ crop planting, future climate mapping, what is the market value and future demand, and will transport trucks be required.



Promotion and Marketing

Understanding the desired product, future use, and market which could include firewood planting, shelter belts, less productive land, biodiversity benefits, specialty timbers, agist a tree, leasing land for trees, and commercial options.

Conclusion

This is a viable opportunity that could be realised in the short and longer term.