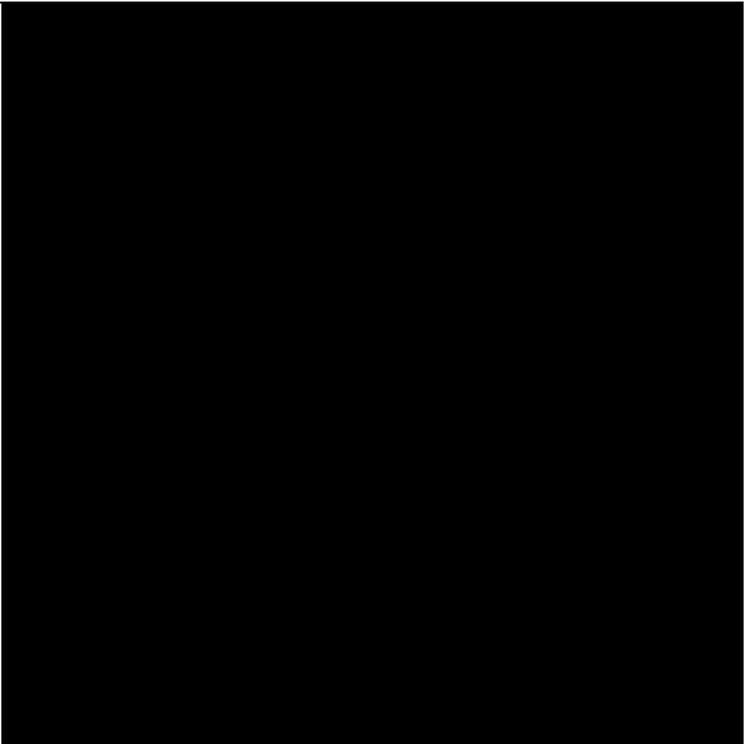


Social Assessment with Indigenous Aboriginal Communities in the Eden CRA Region

A report undertaken for the NSW CRA/RFA Steering Committee
May 1998



SOCIAL ASSESSMENT WITH INDIGENOUS ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES IN THE EDEN CRA REGION

**MERRIMAN'S ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY,
BEGA ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY,
EDEN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY,
DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY INDUSTRIES
AND ENERGY SOCIAL ASSESSMENT UNIT**

**A report undertaken for the NSW CRA/RFA Steering
Committee
project number NE 39/ES
May 1998**

Report Status

This report has been prepared as a working paper for the NSW CRA/RFA Steering Committee under the direction of the Economic and Social Technical Committee. It is recognised that it may contain errors that require correction but it is released to be consistent with the principle that information related to the comprehensive regional assessment process in New South Wales will be made publicly available.

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This project has been jointly funded by the New South Wales and Commonwealth Governments. The work undertaken within this project has been managed by the joint NSW / Commonwealth CRA/RFA Steering Committee which includes representatives from the NSW and Commonwealth Governments and stakeholder groups.

The project has been overseen and the methodology has been developed through the Economic and Social Technical Committee which includes representatives from the NSW and Commonwealth Governments and stakeholder groups.

The Social Assessment Unit wishes to acknowledge the contribution by the Merriman's Aboriginal Community, the Bega Aboriginal Community and the Eden Aboriginal Community, in particular Mr Michael Darcy, Mr John Dixon and Mr Ben Cruse, for their participation and sharing of stories regarding their communities' use and value of public forests in the Eden RFA region.

Disclaimer

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared for the joint Commonwealth/State Steering Committee which oversees the comprehensive regional assessments of forests in New South Wales.

The comprehensive regional assessments (CRAs) provide the scientific basis on which the State and Commonwealth governments will sign regional forest agreements (RFAs) for the major forests of New South Wales. These agreements will determine the future of the State's forests, providing a balance between conservation and ecologically sustainable use of forest resources.

This report was undertaken to satisfy the NSW and Commonwealth Governments desire for full consultation with Indigenous Aboriginal communities to ensure the development of a truly comprehensive, adequate and representative forest reserve system. This report is based on the outcomes from three community meetings held within each local area Land Councils which occur in the RFA region to document the social significance of the forests to the Indigenous Aboriginal community.

This report was approved by the Bega, Eden Merriman Aboriginal Management Committee in May 1998.

The following report documents the history of social benefits obtained by Indigenous Aboriginal use of the forests, past, present and future Indigenous Aboriginal employment in forest industries, and the social consequences of forest policy in the Eden region for Indigenous Aboriginal communities.

2. INDIGENOUS ABORIGINAL HISTORY

The numerous tribes in the area east of the Great Dividing Range between the Moruya River and the Snowy River referred to themselves collectively as Ratungal Yuin (on the coastal areas) and Paendra Yuin (on the plateau). The Ngarigo tribe was the common family group around the Bombala Shire region. Coastal tribes such as the Walbanga, the Djiringanj and the Thaua occupied areas north of the Bemboka River and the Bidawal tribe extended from Green Cape to Mallacoota and onto the tableland. Some Indigenous Aboriginal people now living in the Eden CRA region identify themselves as Monaro and are involved in the Monaro-Ngarigo-Cheruipirn Council which is a registered native title claimant.

The annual harvesting of the bogong moths was a significant event for local tribes, as was the occasional beaching of whales providing an abundance of food which was shared between the coastal and neighboring tribes.

Indigenous Aboriginal artifacts have been found in the region, some dating back 5,500 years.

3. RECENT INDIGENOUS ABORIGINAL SOCIAL HISTORY IN THE EDEN RFA AREA AND THE TIMBER INDUSTRY

In 1891 an Aboriginal reserve was gazetted at Wallaga lake by the Aboriginal Protection Board. In the late 1940's, some Indigenous Aboriginal people camped on the Bega River and were employed as seasonal vegetable pickers. A prominent landholder in the Wallaga Lake area, Harry Bates, gave freehold land to the Wallaga Lake people in return for their labour. The Wallaga Lake area was the first Indigenous Aboriginal Place in NSW to be gazetted under the NSW Aboriginal Protection Board in 1881 as an Aboriginal Reserve.

More recent Indigenous Aboriginal social history has been closely related to the

development of the timber industry in the region.

With the increase in technology, mechanisation and the influx of large companies such as Edgell's and Heinz, the Bega Valley Aborigines' Advancement Association was formed in the early 1960's in response to, "concern expressed by community leaders at the deplorable conditions experienced by Indigenous Aborigines in the locality". The objectives of the Association were, "to promote and improve the welfare of Indigenous Aborigines and to coordinate, work with, and assist all other groups in promoting the welfare of Indigenous Aborigines' generally". The Association's main focus was on housing and employment needs within the community which led to the Kiah accommodation and employment project. The project aimed to provide temporary accommodation to enable Indigenous Aborigines to take advantage of employment opportunities in the local timber industry.

The Kiah accommodation and employment project opened in March 1970. Six caravans provided accommodation over the period of this project, from March 1970 to July 1972, and housed in total 76 people from 16 families (30 adults, 8 young adults, 38 children) over the life of the project. Time pressures, suggested to be due to the requirement to have local and state 'dignitaries' present at the opening ceremony, prevented all amenities being completed which led to some disruption during the initial stages. Each family, by agreement, repaid the Association by installment for rent on the caravans and workers repaid the Association for the provision of appropriate work wear such as helmets, wet-weather outfits etc.

The Association negotiated with various Government agencies at all levels to make the project a reality, and early assurances that six families from the Kiah project would be placed in next available permanent housing were not realised.

With the cooperation of the Harris-Daishowa contractors, men from Kiah were engaged as sub-contractors. The Association acted as employer of the sub-contractors and provided

necessary bush equipment such as chain saws etc. Assistance was received through the Employment Training Scheme for Indigenous Aborigines and a Commonwealth grant was obtained to purchase the balance of the necessary bush equipment. Mr O. Cruse was the first supervisor/foreman of the crew.

A training program was developed for the eight adult and four junior workers. The aim of the program was to equip a man to operate as a self-employed person in the timber industry able to carry out roles within a bush crew, to service and maintain equipment, and achieve an awareness of the cost structure of the operation. Individual production figures were kept enabling members of the group to evaluate their own performance. Training concentrated on the roles of faller and pulp wood cutter, with plans to expand training to encompass trucking and snagging operations.

The training program ceased at the end of January 1971. During the program, three adults and one junior left due to the difficulty in finding suitable permanent housing arrangements. However, some of the other eight workers remaining in the scheme went on to find permanent work elsewhere in the timber industry once permanent housing was obtained.

The five remaining members of the team chose to continue work in the forest and later were employed in the chip mill.

[Information has been sourced primarily from a report by the Venerable F. Woodwell, President of the Bega Valley Aborigines Advancement Association and Joan A. Whetton, Social Worker for the Association.]

4. POPULATION

Across the Eden RFA region, 523 people identified as Indigenous Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander in the 1996 Census. It should be noted that such census information consistently underestimates actual numbers in the Indigenous Aboriginal community due to the format, distribution and level of information required by the census collection.

The largest Indigenous Aboriginal communities (by Census population) are in Eden and Bega. A significant Indigenous Aboriginal community also lives in Wallaga Lake near Bermagui.

5. EMPLOYMENT

In the past, some Indigenous Aboriginal people have found employment predominantly in seasonal work as well as in fishing and forestry. Forest industry employment was held cutting sleepers, poles, collecting firewood as well as working in the sawmills as benchmen and general hands. As the timber industry contracted in the Eden region, many Indigenous Aboriginal people lost employment as a result of increasing mechanisation of the industry and the subsequent workforce downsizing. Indigenous Aboriginal people were the first to lose their jobs in the timber industry and, as economic growth has declined in other sectors (seasonal work and fishing), they were again the first to lose out at a time when no government assistance was available. In contrast, the non-Indigenous community now being displaced from the timber industry is receiving compensation in the form of financial assistance and retraining through FISAP.

During this current study, employment in forest related industries of Indigenous Aboriginal people is minimal. Some Indigenous Aboriginal people are employed in forest management and there is a licenced firewood team funded by the Federal Government under the ATSIC CDEP Program.

Many local Indigenous Aboriginal groups have identified opportunities to gain economic independence through continued access to forest areas traditionally used by them and to gain the rights to control and manage Indigenous Aboriginal cultural heritage. Such opportunities include bush tucker, traditional craft making and cultural tourism. The changes in forest use by the timber industry (both past and present) and legal restrictions on access to and use of forests, continues to impact heavily on the ability of Indigenous Aboriginal people to continue those traditional

activities and to gain economic independence through their sustainable use of the forests.

The economic base of Indigenous Aboriginal women has also been adversely affected by the timber industry, particularly through the destruction of birthing places and the loss of plant species and bush tucker.

The Indigenous Aboriginal communities of the Eden CRA/RFA region have identified the importance of regaining their right to access and use of forest areas for both their economic development and the revitalisation of their culture. The Indigenous Aboriginal communities have unanimously stated that they want to take control of the management of significant sites and places and the flora and fauna of significance to ensure they are protected. These significant things are crucial to the future of Indigenous Aboriginal culture and well-being. The communities also want to be able to have their own people trained in site management and flora and fauna protection so that they can undertake heritage and site assessment on behalf of their communities. this is essential in recognition of the fact that the Aboriginal people are the rightful custodians and interpreters of their culture

6. INFRASTRUCTURE

The Bega Valley Shire Community Support Services Directory lists 19 service providers for the Indigenous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in the area. Of these groups, only five are specifically targeted at the Indigenous Aboriginal community such as; the Aboriginal Health Service, Koori Aged Community Care Aboriginal Corporation, New Careers for Aboriginal People, Twofold Aboriginal Corporation and the Biggah Aboriginal Enterprises Corporation in Bega. Outside of the Bega Valley Shire, the Community Development Employment Program provides some work and community support for people mainly in the Wallaga Lake (Merrimans Land Council) district, as well as the construction of the Keeping Place at Eden.

7. OUTCOMES OF INDIGENOUS ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

7.1 MERRIMAN'S LAND COUNCIL AREA

Held 2 December, 1997, Umbarra, Wallaga Lake.

History of Timber Industry Involvement

During the 1900's, many of the elders from Umbarra worked in the timber industry all over the region, cutting mine poles, sleepers, working in local mills and for the Forestry Commission in Narooma.

There has been a history of cooperation between the Aboriginal people and logging contractors, particularly in the identification and protection of significant sites in logging coupes.

Current Involvement in Forest Industries

The current involvement of indigenous people in the local forest industries is reportedly nil. There are no known members of the Indigenous Aboriginal community currently working in forest industries on a permanent full-time basis.

This year, the local Community Development Employment Program (CDEP), based at Wallaga Lake, was prevented from collecting firewood in Murrah State Forest as a result of the IDFA.

Identified Opportunities resulting from the RFA

- The Indigenous Aboriginal people within the Eden RFA have drafted a Heads of Agreement document to be signed by the CFMEU, FPA, NAFI, NCC and the SEFCC regarding Indigenous Aboriginal's rights and interests in the Eden RFA. As part of this agreement, Indigenous Aboriginal people are seeking a commitment from all signatories to develop a joint employment

strategy to maximise employment, training and career development opportunities in the forest based industries. This document is currently being discussed with stakeholders.

- The main theme of the workshops was on attaining economic independence through job creation.
- Initial discussions have been held with NPWS regarding a possible 10 positions, initially for 12 months, then permanently, carrying out general construction work including new roading, carpark, boardwalks. This is still under discussion and no agreement has been finalised.
- Narooma District office of the NPWS is also conducting a three day course for ten people, to certify as 'honorary rangers' from the Indigenous Aboriginal community. This is a joint NPWS and NSW Tourism initiative, with those ten people being 'available' to conduct tours on an ad hoc, honorary basis. These are not permanent positions, but casual voluntary positions on a demand basis.
- The community has identified access to the local forests for collection of firewood and other items to promote independent economic development as a high priority outcome of the CRA process.
- Additional opportunities identified by the Indigenous Aboriginal people include; a seed collection, propagation and nursery enterprise, firewood collection, hardwood plantation establishment (in recently logged areas to accelerate regeneration).
- Early discussions are also being held with the South East Timber Association regarding support to establish an Indigenous Aboriginal logging contract and crew including all necessary training and financial support. SETA has predicated this support on getting a positive industry outcome from the RFA.

7.2 BEGA LAND COUNCIL AREA

Held 3 December, 1997, Bega

History of Timber Industry Involvement

Within the RFA region the indigenous community has traditionally been involved in the timber industry. Employment schemes such as the Kiah accommodation and employment project supported by the Bega Valley Aborigines' Advancement Association operated in 1967. Prior to that time indigenous workers were employed in local logging and milling businesses in small numbers.

Current Involvement in Forest Industries

The current involvement of indigenous people in the local forest industries is reportedly nil. The RFA provides an opportunity for indigenous issues to be formally recognised, particularly as they relate to access and use of native forests in the region. One of the main concerns of the Indigenous Aboriginal people is to gain economic independence for their communities through the sustainable use of forest resources.

Identified Opportunities resulting from the RFA

- The Indigenous Aboriginal communities in the Merriman's, Eden and Bega Land Council regions have formed a joint committee (BEM) to provide input to the RFA process. The Committee represents Indigenous Aboriginal people and ensures that Indigenous people have a voice in the debate over forest use and access.
- The Bega Indigenous Aboriginal community has identified a number of joint management areas of significance to be managed in cooperation with NPWS and/or State Forests. These areas are being considered within the RFA process by all stakeholders.
- The community is seeking economic independence through the provision of training to enable them to create employment through contracting for local

bodies in areas such as; fire control, weed eradication, sand dune restoration, and boardwalk construction. Such a scheme requires provision of training for the community in the use of chainsaws, bulldozers etc. Such training would be accredited and transferable to other forms of employment.

- The use of local Indigenous Aboriginal experts to identify significant sites was seen to be a major opportunity for the community, mainly through State Forests. This idea is in initial stages and discussions are continuing with State Forests in 1998.
- The group identified a need for support for the creation of small businesses eg, local craftspeople, artists, bush tucker etc. Towards this goal, the BEM is planning to work with the Bega Enterprise Centre to conduct training in the preparation of business management plans. The Local Indigenous Aboriginal Community is also planning to work with Bega Coast Train to conduct small business workshops.
- The community identified their desire to be more involved in local environmental issues and Catchment Management Committees as an immediate priority.

7.3 EDEN LAND COUNCIL AREA

Held 12 December, 1997, Eden.

History of Timber Industry Involvement

The Eden Indigenous Aboriginal community has a history of dependence on the native forests in the Eden RFA region. Both as employees in the timber industry (see Chapter 3 above) as well as traditional users of other forest products and keepers of significant sites.

Current Involvement in Forest Industries

There are currently no Indigenous Aboriginal community members employed in the forest industries. The group identified that their input into forest management is essential to ensure that appropriate access to significant sites is maintained and those sites preserved. The group has identified areas of forest and proposed joint management of those areas in conjunction with the public forest management agencies.

Existing training programs, for example with State Forests, have provided periods of training of 6 to 12 months for up to 20 people over the last four years, however, no permanent jobs have been available at the end of the training period.

Potential employment opportunities have been identified by the community in restoration of areas, eradication of weeds and pest, and management of significant sites. Presently, significant site management is largely carried out by National Parks, however, more efficient and effective management could be undertaken by the Indigenous Aboriginal community who possess the specific knowledge about the sites, and have the commitment to manage and preserve those sites.

Identified Opportunities resulting from the RFA

- Indigenous Aboriginal communities need access to employment associated with their access to the forest. Such employment should include management of sites. Any additional funding to facilitate access and employment should be incorporated into existing Indigenous Aboriginal programs in the region, such as the CDEP, not on new programs.
- Preferred tenderer process for tenders on public lands should be accorded to the Indigenous Aboriginal community, who already possess the specific skills necessary to appropriately manage significant sites and to carry out other works in public forests such as road construction, walking tracks, boardwalk construction etc. Work groups already exist where members of the community have been working on projects such as the construction of the Keeping Place.
- Increased tourism opportunities were also identified by the Indigenous Aboriginal community which require access to roads, certain types of terrains and vegetations as well as significant sites. The Indigenous Aboriginal community's access to, and management of, identified areas of the forest would facilitate the preservation of sites as well as provide an economic asset base which could contribute to employment for community members.