Newsletter

Edition #3 - December 2024

Dear $[UD:FIRST_NAME||]$,

Welcome to this edition of the Murray Region Forestry Hub newsletter.

The team at MRFH are dedicated to keeping you informed about the developments, challenges, and opportunities in this vital sector and the communities that support it. Stay tuned for political and policy updates, funding opportunities and much more.

Your opinion important to us. We invite you to actively engage with us by sharing your thoughts, and suggestions. Together, we can foster a greater appreciation for our forests, our industry and the communities we operate in.

Thank you for being part of our community and wishing everyone a very Merry Christmas!

Message from our Hub Chair

Picture: Dean Anderson, Chair Softwoods Working Group

Christmas and the beginning of a New Year are a time of reflection and imagining; and when you combine this with a quick look around the world you certainly become very grateful about living in any of the communities that make up the Murray Region.

Looking back on what the Murray Region Forestry Hub (MRFH) has achieved to date is a testament to Peter Crowe's leadership, the significant effort of Phil Clements, and the support of people like Diana Gibbs and Terese Adams. This momentum has been enhanced by the efforts of Carlie Porteous.

Going forward the onus is fully upon all the members of the MRFH to imagine what a successful and community supported future forest industries looks like and to provide the Commonwealth with quality information to assist policy development that addresses, plantation development opportunities, infrastructure needs, additional processing potential and employment opportunities.

The Commonwealth Government has provided an amendment to the MRFH Agreement that provides funding till the end of June 2027, with a further allocation to be used to appropriately promote and share what is learnt through MRFH investigations. With this continued real support for the forest industries in the Murray Region I expect the MRFH to grab the New Year with enthusiasm to ensure we are effective in assisting the Commonwealth in developing policies that ensures a continuation and enhancement of the success that the forest industries bring to our local communities and Australia as a whole.

Christmas in the Murray Region for all the MRFH members is never a clean break as there is always something happening. Local Government must keep the essentials of water, sewerage and roads functioning and be ready to operate Emergency Management Centres. The Visy paper machine does not stop, so the site is fully functioning, and harvest and haul crews are operating. The sawmills and others use the opportunity to catchup on maintenance. The forest growers are ever vigilant for fires at this time of year. However, what Christmas does bring to us all is a clear reminder that when there is that lull in work demands that the priority for our attention is family and close friends. I encourage you all to make the most of what opportunity you may have, to do this.

I wish everyone a safe, calm and rewarding festive season and look forward to working with you in the New Year on continuing to enhance the Murray Region through our forest industries.

Regards,

Dean Anderson
Chair SWG & MRFH

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Message from our Hub Manager

The hub has had a fantastic year, expanding its engagement mechanisms and delivering a number of solid projects that will inform government. As we move into 2025, the Hub is still keen to expand engagement from the membership, especially in many parts of Victoria. If you are interested in being involved in the Hub Working Groups; Adequate Infrastructure, Resource Security and Growth and Community Engagement and Communications, please reach out to me.

Picture: Dean Anderson - Chair MRFH

Recently the Hub also welcomed new Chairperson, Mr Dean Anderson. Dean comes with a wealth of knowledge in forestry and fire incident management as well as good governance and managerial experience. Dean looks forward to reaching out and meeting the broader Hub stakeholders over the coming months.

Blackberry Project

The much anticipated Blackberry Impacts project has come to a conclusion after deviating from its original scope to include the much required socio-economic modeling. The Hub hosted almost 60 stakeholders in Albury October 31, for the Strategic Blackberry Forum. Guest speakers set the scene for an afternoon of brainstorming and commitments to resources in order to develop the Strategic Action Plan.

Key highlights from the report MURR-2022-016a Blackberry Impacts Report – Stage 1

- 44 Interviews were conducted during the information gathering and stakeholder engagement stage of the report. Stakeholders from various backgrounds such as industry, landcare, national parks, crown lands, fire management, research, weed advocacy groups, government departments, and landholders.
- The report documents the extensive number of strategies and plans that exist at all levels of government to address this Weed of National Significance. However in some cases it is not listed for management activities.
- The report documents the multiple agencies involved in biosecurity and weed management at state and federal government levels and outlines their function in relation to invasive weed management.
- The available information sourced in the report suggests that at all levels of government, the blackberry is categorized as 'Asset Based Protection' only, suggesting the return on investment is minimal and lacks government spending priority. Yet, in many reports, such as the report completed by the Natural Resources Commission, it is ranked as the most problematic.

- The reports suggests that despite the lack of coordinated government funding, there is an overall desire to work collectively, with a long-term strategy to manage the blackberry infestation to manageable levels.
- The need for a genuine, well funded and well researched biocontrol will be necessary to manage blackberry at scale. This combined with collective efforts was seen as providing the most positive outcome. Respondents raised concerns about the ongoing use of chemical treatment on the localized environment.
- Blackberry will continue to and further restrict access to productive land if not managed.

Key highlights from the report MURR-2022-016b Assessment of costs imposed by Blackberry infestation – stage 2

- ABRES and other state and federal weed agencies estimate the cost imposed to the Agriculture sector of Australia to manage weeds at nearly $5billion.
- This is the first report that quantifies the impact of blackberries on forestry land management and production.
- The cost of managing blackberries for softwood plantations as well as the production loss incurred through competition for land is significant. It is estimated that the production loss can be up to 5 mean annual increment (MAI) or cubic metres per hectare.
- **Costs for managing Blackberry infestation in forestry areas within the MRFH boundary is approximately $5.16m/year**.
- **Overall costs, including lost production based on a MAI of 3m3 is nearly $42million/year.**
- Regional impacts were quantified in the report in order to understand the flow-on impacts associated with production loss. **The total potential reduction on regional economies in the Hub is $306million/year.**

Please find the relevant documents related to this project HERE. The Hub has engaged with the relevant department(s) on the outcome of stages 1 & 2 and look forward to further advice on the outcome of the workshop and the Strategic Action Plan.

Community Sentiment Project

Additionally, the Hub kicked off Stage 1 of the community sentiment project, with Fishbowl PR. The first stage will be a comprehensive review of who the stakeholders are, where they are located, what their connection is to the industry, how they like to be engaged, and flesh out some key themes. The aim of stage 1 is to ensure the outcome of such work will have meaningful advice to government. The Fishbowl PR team will commence the desktop assessment work over the Christmas break, reporting back to the Working Group in the new year.

Request for Proposal

Looking forward, the Hub, alongside the Central West Forestry Hub, have released a Request for Proposal to conduct a very strategic and crucial project assessing the relative impacts and benefits of environmental plantings versus production plantations under the ACCU scheme as well as the driving factors in land change decision making. This project aims to provide comprehensive data and policy recommendations that ensure environmental sustainability is achieved with economic viability.

The MRFH and the CWFH along with many other industry stakeholders are keen to see this project commence soon and encourage all capable consultancy firms to submit a proposal. The RFP for this project is available HERE.

The Hub leadership team and staff (including the wonderful Terese!) wish you all a safe Christmas period. We can't wait to get cracking in 2025, refreshed and energised.

Regards,

Carlie Porteous

MRFH Hub Manager & SWG Executive Officer

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Strategic Blackberry Forum Tackles "Wicked Problem" of Blackberry Infestations

On 31 October 2024, the Murray Region Forestry Hub (MRFH), in partnership with The Regional Development Company, hosted a Strategic Blackberry Forum at the Albury Club, bringing together 50 participants from diverse sectors. Representatives from national, NSW, and Victorian organisations, government agencies, private enterprises, and community groups united to confront the escalating challenges posed by blackberry infestations across the region.

Photo: ***Mr Justin Clancy, MP***

The forum, described as addressing a "wicked problem" requiring collaborative, innovative solutions, focused on four key objectives: understanding the context of blackberry management, developing collaborative strategies, planning long-term solutions, and securing stakeholder commitments.

Key Highlights and Outcomes:

The day featured presentations on the economic and ecological impacts of blackberries, insights from past and ongoing control efforts, and discussions on collective impact strategies. Attendees identified priority areas for action and pledged resources for a collaborative, tenure-blind approach to blackberry management.

The outcomes of the forum will inform the development of a Strategic Plan, with several attendees committing to join a working group to guide this process. The event underscored the importance of united action to restore ecological balance and protect regional economic interests.

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November 2024 edition of the Eden-Monaro Grants Bulletin is now available online

The November 2024 edition of the Eden-Monaro Grants Bulletin is now available online.

This latest edition provides details of more than **400 grants, scholarships, and funding rounds** from Local Government, the NSW Government, and the Australian Government, including private and philanthropic grants.

Grant funding is available to assist individuals and organisations such as community groups, sports clubs, schools, students, researchers, small businesses, and farmers.

These grants can benefit our whole community and are keen to see as many of them as possible come to Eden-Monaro.

If you haven't already done so, you can sign-up to receive future Grants Bulletin updates here: Grants Bulletin sign up

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University of Canberra - 2024 Regional Wellbeing Survey

The **2024 Regional Wellbeing Survey (RWS)** is now open, and the University Of Canberra invite you to be part of this important initiative!

Since 2013, the Regional Wellbeing Survey has provided critical insights into the factors affecting the wellbeing and resilience of Australians living in diverse communities. Each year, approximately 15,000 people contribute their perspectives, shaping a clearer understanding of the challenges and opportunities across our regions.

By participating, you're helping to build a comprehensive picture of regional resilience and livability. The results inform decisions made by a wide range of organizations, supporting stronger, healthier communities across the nation.

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Forestry Corporation Boosts Firefighting Ranks Ahead of Summer

Forestry Corporation has added 96 new recruits to its firefighting roster this year after a series of training camps, as NSW prepares to mark the fifth anniversary of the Black Summer Bushfires.

As one of the state's four firefighting authorities, Forestry Corporation manages more than 2-million hectares of State forests and will have more than 500 firefighters rostered on for fire response this summer.

Since the 2019-2020 fires, the agency has increased its firefighting ranks and upgraded its fleet, with staff bolstering their experience on NSW fire fronts while lending support and experience on interstate and international firefighting deployments.

The Corporation each year stages fire camps across regional NSW where staff train and upskill on new and existing fireground equipment and appliances.

Source: Timberbiz

READ MORE

Festive Season Office Closure

The Hub and SWG team will be taking a well-earned break over the holiday season. Our office will be closed from today **13th December 2024 to 6 January 2025**.

Wishing everyone a safe and enjoyable Christmas with family and friends.

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