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C9**AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY****Overview**

Agriculture is a significant industry in Central Goldfields Shire and is of major economic significance to the Loddon dryland catchment, the wider region and Victoria. The gross value of agricultural production in the shire in 1996-97 was around \$ 19.7 million. Cropping (wheat, lupins, canola and other oil seed, peas, lucerne, oats) is significant with a contribution of \$10.24 million in the same year.

The future of the agricultural industry is dependent on sustainable agricultural practices. Sustainable management of land and water resources that address issues such as soil salinity, erosion and maintaining the quality and quantity of water will contribute to increased productivity as well as a healthy catchment.

Agricultural land in the Shire is a resource that must be maintained for productive use. Land use conflict can occur between agriculture and residential land use with potential to reduce the productive capacity of agricultural farm units. Land use planning within the Shire must minimise occurrence of such conflicts.

Land use planning in Central Goldfields Shire must respond to the changes that are occurring in agriculture. Of particular relevance to Central Goldfields is the growth of agricultural industries that are less reliant on access to water such as timber production and intensive animal husbandry. However agricultural areas adjacent the Loddon river may see more intense horticultural activities in the future.

Issues

- Agricultural cropping potential including stock feed and special export based crops (lupins, canola, peas, oil crops and noodle wheat).
- Productive agricultural land in the shire is a resource that needs to be protected.
- Sustainable land management is the key to continued agricultural productivity of the Shire's rural areas.
- Potential for developing farm forestry and native timber furniture industries;
- Horticultural potential in areas to the north of the Shire adjacent to and with access to water from the Loddon River.
- Supply of water within the Loddon and Avoca River catchments is an issue of growing concern. The number, size and siting of dams can have an adverse downstream impact.
- Land use conflicts can occur between agricultural and residential land use in the Shire's rural areas.
- Intensive agriculture industries have the potential to cause effluent disposal problems and affect the amenity of adjacent land uses if they are inappropriately located.
- Emergence of alternative agricultural enterprises such as essential oils at Stoney Creek and boutique vineyards at Laanecoorie, Amherst, Havelock and Alma.

Objective 1

Promote the potential of various forms of productive dryland agriculture as a significant component of the Shire's and region's economy.

Strategies

- Restrict the subdivision and alienation of productive agricultural land and discourage conversion to land uses that take the land out of productive use
- Encourage and assist the propagation of Box Ironbark woodlotting and other agri-forestry ventures.
- Limit inappropriate development of existing crown allotment subdivisions and encourage farm consolidation.
- Ensure land use planning avoids conflicts between agricultural and residential land use.
- Promote, where appropriate, alternative cropping, intensive agriculture and value added enterprises.
- Protect rural and agricultural infrastructure such as roads.
- Assess the implications of development proposals in rural areas in terms of their impact on existing and proposed infrastructure.
- Encourage enterprise mix within agricultural farming units and product processing at the source of the agricultural product subject to environmental and infrastructure criteria being met. (eg treatment and disposal of effluent and maintaining condition of rural roads).

Objective 2

Encourage ecologically sustainable farm management practices having regard to the North Central Regional Catchment Management Strategy, particularly the priority issues such as salinity, erosion, water management and nutrient run-off.

Strategies

- Support sustainable agricultural practices that are based on soil types.
- Ensure intensive agriculture industries are located so as to minimise risks associated with effluent disposal and protect the amenity of adjacent land uses.
- Ensure land capability assessment is part of the approval process for land use and development located in areas of the shire where environmental conditions need to be met.
- Ensure that method and location of effluent disposal systems in unsewered areas minimise the risk of pollution to watercourses and that efficiency of effluent disposal systems are monitored at regular intervals.
- Ensure that the use and development of land in rural areas minimises the loss of remnant native vegetation.
- Assist, where possible, in the implementation of the North Central Regional Catchment Management Strategy and other key natural resource strategies.

Implementation

These strategies will be implemented by:

- Application of the Farming Zone covering the Shires' agricultural areas.
- Adoption of a 40 hectare minimum subdivision size for dryland areas.
- Application of a Rural Conservation Zone covering watercourses and environs and water catchment areas.

- Limit the application of the Rural Living Zone to areas adjacent to urban areas and where the predominant land use is residential and where agriculture is subordinate to the residential land use.
- Use of salinity and nutrient catchment management plans, relevant water quality, flood management and other relevant natural resource strategies as reference documents to assist in assessment of land use and development proposals in rural zones.

Undertake further strategic work

- Undertake land capability studies for areas of the Shire that have not previously been studied.
- Prepare site management and design guidelines for the establishment of value added industries within rural areas.