

Western Plains Regional Development

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Mr. Ian Dundas
Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Regional Services
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

email: Primary.Industries.Reps@aph.gov.au

Dear Mr. Dundas,

Please find attached our submission to the Inquiry into the Development of High Technology Industries in Regional Australia based on Bioprospecting.

The Western Plains Regional Development Group is a community based organisation dedicated to strategic planning of the long-term sustainable economic, social and cultural development of the Central Lachlan bioregion.

Our membership consists of local farming organisations, social and indigenous groups, and small businesses in Condobolin and Lake Cargelligo and surrounding villages.

In addition to membership fees, our organisation is financially supported by the Lachlan Shire Council, received a grant from the Department of Transport and Regional Services to enable a whole-of-community regional strategic plan during 2001, and is assisted by whole-of-government services of the Premiers and Regional Development Departments.

I thank you for the opportunity to present these matters and recommendations to the Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Regional Services, and look forward to discussing any details with you where required.

Yours faithfully,

Pieter Verasdonck
Regional Development Planner

Attachments: Submission Details

SUBMISSION TO

THE INQUIRY INTO DEVELOPMENT OF HIGH TECHNOLOGY INDUSTRIES IN REGIONAL AUSTRALIA BASED ON BIOPROSPECTING

Background to the Submission:

The Central Lachlan bioregion consists of the living ecology and human communities sharing the landscape at the geographical center of New South Wales.

The region is governed by Federal, State and Local Government departments, as well as served, regulated and promoted by a variety of agencies and authorities, each with their own particular definition of regional administration areas.

The divergent definitions of regional footprints can hinder timely coordination of strategic planning and evaluation, and may produce confusion about responsibilities. The economy and ecology of the Central Lachlan bioregion has regressed at times.

The Western Plains Regional Development Group was formed to enable a long-term vision of sustainable regional development, and communicate its uniquely regional needs and capabilities to all stakeholders.

As part of its mission, the group seeks to widen the industrial base, improve income and employment potential, and resolved to make a submission to the Inquiry in order to be better informed about the commercialisation of bioprospecting.

Widening of the Economic Base

Farm mechanisation, urbanisation, globalisation and economic rationalism unsupported by planning certainties have eroded the population and industrial base of the Central Lachlan bioregion over the past fifty years.

The district is in urgent need of widening the economic base to create jobs for its youth and attract new investment and new rural industries. Bioprospecting and biotechnology initiatives may offer the possibility of diversification, employment creation and productivity gains.

These new technologies fit the comparative advantages of the region. The region therefore could contribute to the development of high technology knowledge industries

based on bioprospecting, bioprocessing and related biotechnologies if the income capacity of non GMO farming enterprises or the living environment is not harmed.

Location Advantages

The Central Lachlan bioregion offers partnership synergies to appropriate bioprospecting initiatives.

The Condobolin office of the Department of Land and Water Conservation has an excellent collection of the identified plants of Western NSW in its herbarium. The Office was originally established and became the base for the survey of vegetation of Western New South Wales in the 1930's and 1940's, and the handbook *Plants of Western NSW* written by Cunningham, Mulhan, Millthorpe and Leigh was written here.

The District also houses a 4300 acre Department of Agriculture Research Station and is the hub of best practice in broad acre farming through farmer driven research such as Conservation Farmers and Central West Farming Systems. The Research Station is currently under-utilised and has an empty glasshouse.

The region has low population densities, enabling appropriate biosecurity zones, but is well serviced by rail, air and road, and centrally located between the Eastern Seaboard capital cities, universities and research organisations.

Community Concerns

There is a serious lack of information about the benefits and drawbacks of bioprospecting and biotechnology. As a result the community is not able to appreciate decisions with regard to these new technologies.

There is the perception that these new technologies cannot easily co-exist with other production and marketing strategies. Public awareness campaigns are needed, and community debate needs to be encouraged.

In response, the Western Plains Regional Development Group has resolved to establish a *Sub-committee on Future Farming and Biotechnology* to advise member organisations, help inform the community, liaise with the Lachlan Shire Council, and communicate with external agencies on related issues .

A study group will act as an advisory panel to the strategic planning effort during 2001. Members need to be informed about each proposed product or process, so as to assess each GMO modification process and application on its own merits.

Recommendations:

1. That the Inquiry facilitates the commissioning of a feasibility study to assess the the Condobolin area for:
 - (1) The appropriate development of bioprospecting support industries, including the analysis of technical issues, environmental impact, socio-economic cost benefits, and the recommendation of community consultative processes required.
 - (2) The appropriate development of a cropping, harvesting, processing and packaging industry of GMO seed and grains, and its implications for the bioregion.
 - (3) GMO R&D strategies and product opportunities to improve on-farm productivity and farming incomes in the region.
2. That the Inquiry facilitates a comprehensive public awareness and education programme on the management of GMO technologies, which encourages informed and ongoing community discussion on these matters.
3. That the Inquiry facilitates the establishment of strategies to minimise the impact of GMO based agricultural products on the production and marketing of non-GMO and certified organic agricultural products, and seeks to enable appropriate policies to safeguard the long-term interests of all producer and consumer groups.