

## Gippsland Sustainable Agriculture Network Forum - Meeting Notes

25 March 2014, WGCMA Traralgon 10:00am – 1:30pm

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Attendees (23): Alan Cole, Alex Arbuthnot, Alison Craven, Amanda Bartkowski, Ashley Hall, Barbara Johnson, Belinda Brennan, Chris Alenson, Darren Williams, David James, Emma Orgill, Fiona Pfeil, Janice Dowe, Jenny O’Sullivan, Kellie Nichols, Kerry Mathews, Malcolm Cock, Megan Hughes, Patrick Maiden, Sam Shannon, Skye Radcliffe-Scott, Tammy Logan, Tia Navanteri.

Apologies: Tony Gardner, Jessie Horton, Anthony Goode, Shayne Haywood, Joan Wallis, Benita Kelsall, Rob Faggian, Gillian Hayman.

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Meeting started 10:10am

Sam welcomed the group and provided a brief history of GSAN.

### **GSAN background**

Started as the Gippsland EMS Reference Group in 2005. Evolved into the Gippsland Sustainable Agriculture Network in 2008 with the purpose “to share knowledge and align action for food and fibre production and land management in Gippsland”. The Future Food and Fibre project (2007-2008) was a significant outcome from the group. Project aim was to build capacity of farmers and service providers to increase adoption of sustainable and profitable farming practices. Outputs included field days, case studies, workshops, newsletters, press releases and a leadership program. In more recent years the forums have focussed on sharing project updates (Regional Roundup) and having guest speakers present on topics of interest or providing training, eg. using social media.

**Sustainability Gippsland website:** [www.sustainabilitygippsland.com](http://www.sustainabilitygippsland.com)

Tammy Logan provided an overview of the functionality of the website. Instructions for using the website are attached.

### **Regional Roundup**

**Alex Arbuthnot** – Landcare Report (attached). Submission to Ag Competitiveness White Paper (attached). Gippsland Food to Asia Action Plan to be launched at Farm World this Friday. Q- Are we getting aloof about Landcare? Change we must – preserve the basis of Landcare.

**Barbara Johnson** – WGCMA Board Member. On Sam’s RLF Steering Committee. Label farmers as “Food Producers” to increase awareness amongst average consumers. Attended NRM conference in Launceston, sustainability workshops – nothing majorly new. Soil Carbon map for Aus released by CSIRO.

**Emma Orgill** – East Gippsland Regional Landcare Facilitator. Keen to put together a similar ‘directory’ of sustainable ag programmes in East Gippsland. Setting up similar forum for East Gippsland – bit too far to come here. Can feed into this group.

**Amanda Bartkowski** – East Gippsland Regional Landcare Coordinator. Working with Emma Orgill to set up similar forum for East Gippsland. Victorian Landcare Grants program. Involved with a range of different projects throughout East Gippsland.

**Patrick Maiden** – GHD. Gippsland Climate Change Network Implementation. Keen to find out what activities are going on that might achieve carbon emission abatement, and to find ways to support those.

**Alison Craven** – Latrobe Catchment Landcare Network Board Member. Working with farmers to protect habitat and biodiversity on farms without losing productivity. Doing this on own farm. ‘Analog’ plantations – various functions including habitat for animals, shelter/shade, growing food.

**Kerry Matthews** – South Gippsland Water. Water Act - Drinking water quality standards – from catchment to the tap. H<sub>2</sub>O grant for riparian work, fencing/trees etc.

**Fiona Pfeil** – Gippsland Water. Water supply for potable and industrial water. Stocktake of landuse in our catchments. Identifying potential sources of pollution, changes in chemistry of water, to check that treatment processes up to scratch. Wherever possible be cooperatively involved with land management practices that benefit water quality. Responsibilities under the Water Act for the provision of safe drinking water so need to work cooperatively with landholders.

**Belinda Brenan** – WGCMA Partnerships and Engagement Team Leader. Dealing with State and Federal investment and CMA partnerships. Role with GSAN – seeing where it all connected and how we can work together, and supporting Sam.

**Malcolm Cock** – Beef industry. Producer and consultant. Hard to be a beef producer and be sustainable. Gippsland Beef Association defunct as DEPI Better Beef Network has taken over that role. Involved with farmer training. Group coordinator for Better Beef Network. Find we get the same old people all the time. Younger generation too busy with head down bum up just trying to survive. Established groups staying together for social reasons – ‘been there and done it all’ – hard to keep them stimulated to gain new knowledge. Challenge to get the silent majority to be active re change – to learn more and see how they can do it better. To be sustainable producers need to be profitable.

**Ashley Hall** – DEPI Sustainability Program Officer. Dabble a lot in other people’s business. Support Local Government through sustainability initiative. Gippsland Priority Plan. RCE (Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development) Open Space Forum on Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> April. Event is on Sustainability Gippsland website.

**Janice Down** – Gippsland Coordinator for Southern Farming Systems. From Traralgon to Orbost. A number of projects in Gippsland looking at fodder production through to cropping. MLA projects, carbon projects, nitrogen projects, and a trial site looking at different varieties of crops and fodder.

**Megan Hughes** – Network Coordinator for Latrobe Catchment Landcare Network. Working with SFS on a trial looking as part of the Healthy Soils Sustainable Farms project. Also remnant Red Gum protection project and weeds project.

**Alan Cole** – Agpath Pty Ltd. Service Laboratory in Garfield. Soil biology. 2 Technicians. Run 2-day weekend workshops a couple of times a year looking at thermal compost tea making. Soil testing and water testing.

**Darren Williams** – Network Coordinator for Maffra District Landcare Network (half time). Also provide ag extension service. Healthy Soils Sustainable Farms project – dryland grazing systems. Working with farmer focus to help them ‘unpack’ the business - from a whole of business perspective, to identify where there is opportunity and to build resilience into the dryland grazing system. Soil trials/paddock trials. Trials will look at overcoming identified limiting factors. Looking at soil health, pastures and grazing from production and NRM perspective.

**Kellie Nichols** – Bass Coast Landcare Network. A number of projects, including Healthy Soils Sustainable Farms project. Also involved with the Western Port Sustainable Ag Project. Recently took 35 farmers down to Tasmania, looking at the dairy industry and poppy industry. Young farmers involved. Biodiversity Fund project – water quality improvements, remnant protection and revegetation. Designing and delivering a vegetation management course. 4 farmer discussion groups going from strength to strength. Developing training needs analysis through that – survey recently sent out, good response already. (Identified training needs will be circulated to GSAN). Soil health projects 10 in WG region, 10 in Westernport region.

**Chis Alenson** – Consultant. Been involved in Healthy Soils projects. Emphasis on Visual Soil Assessment for farmers rather than relying on lab analysis. Private passion – relationship between soil:food:health. Recently launched 5 year project demonstrating sustainable ag – Westernport, Yarra Valley, Mornington Peninsula. Japanese PhD student studying Landcare attended the launch, hoping to introduce the Landcare concept to Japan.

**David James** – Sustainability Team, Fonterra. Helping farmers to understand global warming and the implications - adaptations. Working with communities in dairy farm areas to ensure they are comfortable with that and there is no loss of amenity etc. Also looking at the profitability of farmers as growth = more milk. Profitable as well as sustainable farmers.

**Jenny O’Sullivan** – Beef and sheep farmer, agritourism – “Gippsland Food Adventures”, promoting the stories behind food. Private consultancy – Linking Environment Agriculture and People. Working on energy project with the dairy industry looking at opportunities for efficiencies on farms = reduce costs and improved environmental outcomes. Most gains around cooling milk and heating water. South Gippsland Landcare Network Coordinator. Westernport Health Soils project – first field day at Bob Gray’s. WGCMA Healthy Soils project – demo sites. Grasslands Society meeting Thursday night to revive Gippsland branch. Corner Inlet project – fox control and erosion control funding. Field day on foxes at Welshpool Hotel. Vic Govt funding for Cape Liptrap Bunarong area to preserve, protect and enhance native habitat.

**Tammy Logan** – 2 days as WGCMA Communications and Engagement Project Officer. One day with Gippsland Climate Change Network on Sustainability Gippsland website project. Here to identify ways that website might be able to support groups and projects.

**Tia Navanteri** – Executive Officer Gippsland Climate Change Network. GCCN project manage the Sustainability Gippsland website for all Gippsland councils. Low Carbon Growth Plan implementation – trying to identify areas in the region where abatement can be achieved. Particularly interesting in investigating if there is scope in the ag sector for carbon abatement, where we can assist. Opportunity to assist eg case studies. RCE Open Space Forum at Fed Uni. Dabbled in biofuels, to see what interest there might be – farmers as energy producers.

**Skye Radcliffe-Scott** – South Gippsland Shire Council Sustainability Team. South Gippsland Food Map. Sustainability Festival at Coal Creek – April 13. Build on work with local food producers – funding for 1 day/week support to engage with producers around climate change and what they can do to adapt.

## Workshop Sessions

The following questions were discussed in small groups and then key points fed back to everyone. The summaries are an attempt to encapsulate some of the more consistent ideas that came through, rather than providing a detailed list of all discussion points. More direct notes from group discussion are available on request.

### **1. Is the GSAN purpose statement still relevant? “Sharing knowledge and aligning action for sustainable food and fibre production and land management in Gippsland.”**

#### Summary:

Groups had slightly different views of the current purpose statement, some thought it was reasonably good ‘as is’, while others attempted to reword it. There were questions around the perceived meaning of terms such as ‘sustainable’ – ie. some may perceive it as being environmentally friendly without necessarily considering profit and people. There was no consistent issue raised regarding the current purpose.

### **2. What do you want out of these forums? Ideas for format of the forums, content etc.**

#### Summary of key points:

We need opportunity to share knowledge in more detail. Suggest guest speakers/presentations for each forum. Content must be at a relevant level for the group.

We need time to workshop issues, identify needs/gaps, come up with practical solutions. We could develop collaborative projects to meet identified needs.

Occasional field trips or schedule forum to coincide with other events.

Host meetings at other venues.

Having a diverse group of people is important.

### **3. What do we want to achieve in 4 years?**

#### Summary:

Increase the uptake of sustainable ag practices – although difficult to measure.

Improved networks – to each have a wider and more diverse network of trusted contacts involved in sustainable agriculture in Gippsland.

Improved knowledge – to have an improved understanding of the roles of organisations and individuals involved in sustainable ag in the region. To have an increased awareness of current sustainable ag projects and events in the region.

Increased collaboration – where possible we align projects to achieve efficiencies and improved outcomes. We work together to plan projects ahead of funding cycles when there is an identified need or gap. We attract project funding through collaboration rather than competition.

**Meeting closed 1:30pm**