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## **The Gloucester Project Annual Report 2011**

The Gloucester Project is approaching a major extension of its program as the Gloucester Region enters a critical period in which major external influences will determine the area's essential character and its economic future. TGP has played an important role in the processes which have led up to this position, and hopefully will play a significant role in the future.

An annual report is usually delivered verbally, and assumes that the membership is fully aware of the organisation's primary position and the direction it will be taking in the next period. Because we are about to take our next major step, I want to connect our past to our future, and to encourage the greatest possible understanding and participation of members. This is too comprehensive a statement to be delivered at a meeting in the usual way, so I propose to make it available to everyone in written form, and to table it and only make brief reference to it at our AGM.

A little over a decade ago, Gloucester residents were given a glimpse of a future based on the extraction of mineral wealth. This was quite distinct from the traditional economic and social conditions which had prevailed for generations and which had also attracted many new citizens. The expansion of mineral extraction was presented as inevitable, largely because of the demise of several former rural industries and because laws and regulations give mineral extraction companies rights over those of all other landholders and businesses.

The economic, social and environmental consequences of these changes provoked a reaction from concerned citizens and there began what is now a familiar response of opposition. At a public meeting, it was proposed and agreed that there should be developed an objective assessment of our region's potential and whether the mineral extraction economy was the only economic and social alternative. The perspective to be taken was to evaluate any viable alternative in terms of its impact on the region

and on the region's contribution to the national wellbeing, now and in the future.

One outcome of this process was the formation and incorporation of The Gloucester Project as a community-based organisation devoted to researching and developing an economically and socially viable economy, consistent with community values and expectations, and justifiable in its relationship to the needs of the nation. Over several years, involving mainly voluntary work by many highly qualified and dedicated residents and supporters, TGP has produced a regional development model which has not only won the support of local residents, but has attracted very significant support and investment from government and non government agencies. These include:-

- **The Foundation for Rural and Regional Reconstruction**, NSW award winner and runner up in the national Program. ABC/FRRR granted \$10,000 towards the demonstration horticultural plot, workshops etc.

- **Regional Development Australia, (Hunter)**. RDA, a joint State/Federal body, assessed TGP's program and provided an endorsement statement.

- **Gloucester Shire Council**. Council gave in principle recognition and supporting documentation for funding approaches. Note also the inclusion of horticulture in the recent (Buchan) research and report on the economic future of Gloucester.

- **Catchment Management Authority**, funded a preliminary assessment of seven properties, with a view to assessing their further food-growing potential.

- **Mid Coast Water**, funded an irrigation system for the demonstration patch and water quality assessment.

- **NSW Community Builders program** (\$298,300 grant over three years to establish a model horticultural farm, with emphasis on regional development, supporting economic growth, employment, food production and marketing, consumer interests, etc.)

- **Keep Australia Working** , comprehensive consultation and access to subsidised employment

- **Local, state and national media**

- **Our State and Federal members of parliament.**

This support and funding has made it clear that TGP's model and progress to date has been validated, and seen as relevant to the region and to the wider national interests of regional development, food and water security for our major urban areas, climate adjustment and regional economic growth and stability.

***Thus, The Gloucester Project has met its primary criterion of offering the region and the nation, a viable economic and social alternative to mineral extraction for this region.***

TGP's program responds to a national necessity because it is based on the extension of food production and distribution. TGP has developed and begun to put in place a system which directly responds to the drastic depletion of horticultural land in peri-urban and irrigated land, at a time when agencies such as the United Nations, the World Bank, the Commonwealth Senate Committee, the PMSEIC Expert Working Group and a NSW Government survey all draw attention to the approaching food crisis.

The Gloucester Project's research and development program addresses the multiple issues highlighted in the assessments noted above. It is able to approach these multiple issues because it is designed to operate in a region where all issues combine into an integrated, real world whole.

#### **Two Possible Regional Potentials:**

Gloucester's very significant potential as a food producer gives it a great advantage. Any economic assessment begins with the identification of a region's *Relative Economic Advantage*. Gloucester has two possible REA's. One is food production. The other is mineral extraction. Each would occupy precisely the same portions of land *so in Gloucester, they are mutually exclusive*.

The extraction of coal, CSG, gold, precious stones offers some immediate financial advantages to the government, but little to the region. It involves considerable displacement of residents, businesses and social structures. Impacts on water quality and reliability are well documented. It presents established health impacts for the remaining residents and property devaluation. The mineral resource would be exhausted within a specified period. Reclamation practices preclude the resumption of food producing on conventionally owned and managed farms, probably for generations.

TGP's food production option offers:

- An extension of the existing economic and social structures,
- Enhanced economic, employment and tax base benefits which will continue over generations
- A major product base which will be in demand forever, which contributes to the mitigation of the multiple critical issues noted in national and international reports on the impending

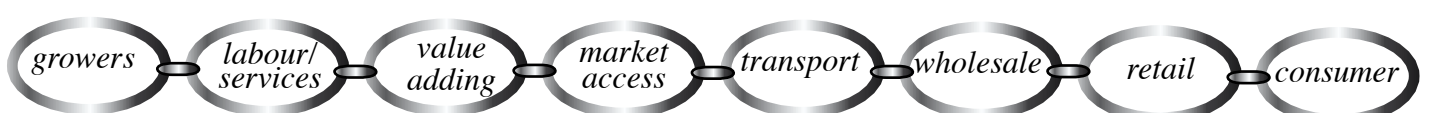
food security crisis

- A food growing area to help replace the depleted horticultural peri-urban and irrigated land. TGP's program is already bringing underutilised land and owners of smaller subdivisions into the production and marketing chain. It now has Government funding to encourage commercial level horticulture, employment building and other community benefits.
- A system which brings growers from small acreage to large scale commercial growers and producers into the supply chain,
- A food supply source only two to three hours from the nation's largest urban concentrations, positively responding to the anticipated impacts of transport costs
- An innovative marketing system which has been demonstrated to produce ***an economic multiplier effect***, documented to have created (up to) a quadrupling of economic, employment and tax base growth.
- An example of sustainable regional development, based on small and medium business development, which could have wider application.

### **The Economic Rationale**

A great deal of weight has been placed on the needs of government to access the wealth offered by mineral extraction. This availability of wealth has often been contrasted with the slower wealth contribution offered by rural industry.

TGP has, however, produced objective evidence that, in its regional development model, a food production and distribution industry can incorporate *an economic multiplier strategy which significantly alters the relative economic advantages* claimed on behalf of the mineral extraction industrial alternative. This strategy involves the establishment in the region of a network of small and medium businesses. These range from food growers, food product processors, transport operators, wholesalers and marketing organisers linking with direct marketing opportunities in local and metropolitan areas. This economic strategy has been effective because the wealth that is created in each enterprise tends to be used and reinvested within the region. We depict this series of business opportunities as links in a chain, although their interrelationship is more complex than the chain diagram suggests.



Significant investment for the development of the next stage of this TGP program has now been provided under the NSW Government's, Community Builders Program. The three year grant is largely directed to develop TGP's support for the food production end of the chain. The land for which we are negotiating can also accommodate TGP's program for the assembly of regional food products and the direct marketing of regional produce. We are preparing bids for funding to provide the infrastructure needed to develop the marketing elements of the program.

### **A Community Driven Program**

It is significant that the Gloucester community has within it an excellent combination of residents with generations of experience in food production and relatively newer residents in retirement and semi-retirement with a range of business and professional experience. Thus TGP has been able to draw upon a rich human resource which has dedicated itself to the research and development of an innovative economic development program. It is a program which has attracted wide and significant support.

The Gloucester Project is now entering on the next phase of its program. It will continue to benefit from the involvement of members and supporters, and will be seeking investment from government and non-government sources.

Members and supporters will be involved in several strands of the integrated program. These will be managing such components as. . .

- encouraging the spread of horticulture throughout the region, demonstrating climatic adjustment techniques, identifying appropriate commercial crops, training and demonstration, water management, sustainable methods, farm management and farm business systems,
- identifying and developing direct marketing opportunities, supporting small businesses in value adding, transport, market prediction, labour team development, establishing a Gloucester brand identity
- community interfacing, involvement of community groups with the migrant and employment programs, school involvement, co-ordination with other community organisations
- research methodology, cost benefit analyses, grant seeking, research reporting
- Information assembly and dissemination

...and the blending of all the above into an integrated regional development program.

It is a very healthy situation that a community- based organisation can establish such a program on behalf of its own future and that of the state and the nation. It is particularly significant in these times, in a period when we have been passing responsibility for the future of ourselves and our children, to representatives who, in many cases, are becoming overwhelmed by the complexity of the demands a community places on them.

A list of those who have given exceptional service to date would probably take another page, and would run the risk of leaving out valued individuals. I would like to say that every member, by their membership, has supported the magnificent effort that has brought us to the present position. I would especially thank those who organised and maintained The Tucker Garden Patch, our demonstration unit which has brought such excellent participation of growers and supporters. The Friends of the Tucker Patch and its co-ordinator provided much valuable support. The Tucker Patch has been responsible for the very positive media attention we have received. A separate report is available which gives substantial detail. Also thanks must be given to our membership co-ordinator.

TGP members played a vital role in supporting the work of council's Economic Development Officer, in the establishment of the Gloucester Farmers Market . Of particular significance was TGP's Community Stall, with its volunteer managers and staff. Several other markets have decided to copy this innovation and its financial management system. The market and the Community Stall are the first units in our market chain, and have been successful in bringing many local food producers into the commercial system.

Other volunteers have assisted with fundraising, materials and mulch gathering, website management, and a multiplicity of services and donations.

We have been blessed by having a dedicated management committee, and several co-opted members, all of whom have provided countless hours of work, managing our affairs, and drafting tedious grant bids, etc. The next stage of TGP's operation will see us increasing commercial level horticulture in the region, and supporting the development of a direct marketing system.

It is also clear that decisions will be made, possibly within a month or two, which will decide whether the land and the water which is vital to our region's food production future, will be preserved for our preferred economy, or will be allowed to be excavated in the interests of mineral extraction. Gloucester is not a big player when judged on the basis of its current rural status. We do not rate as "prime agricultural land" in the

way that the broad acre producers rate. Our position is unique in its potential for extending horticulture and for demonstrating a useful regional development model. We have narrowed the economic advantage that mining offered.

***So, we are in a position where we must impress the decision makers with the logic and economic validity of our position.***

We need to tell them, again and again, that Gloucester, and The Gloucester Project have too much to offer the nation to be allowed to be damaged. **Please resolve to write a letter every week to a state politician, to a newspaper, magazine, radio station, television channel to state the case.** Use our website for more information and contact information. We have a good case to influence metropolitan voters. We all have family and friends in Newcastle and Sydney. Urge them to write to their politicians. After all, it is food for their tables that is at stake. Decision makers will take more notice if metropolitan voters draw attention to the issue.

Think about the list of activities on the previous page and give us your name if you would be prepared to put in a bit of time in any of the parts of the program.

Many thanks for the part you have played to date. We are on the threshold of major progress. We could be responsible for the economic and social shape of our community for generations. I will look forward to continuing to work with you.

Ken Johnson

President The Gloucester Project