

Gippsland Integrated Natural Resources Forum
Launch of Report Card 2007
Keynote Speech

I am delighted to be in Koonwarra on World Environment Day. Koonwarra is well known to me being Australia's first Waste Wise Village and the home of Slow Food. It is a fine example of community-based sustainability.

So who would invite the outsider, a pillager of such a large percentage of Gippsland's resources to speak to a local Gippsland audience who are the stewards of those resources?

I can say that I regard my self as a part-time local – my husband and I are the stewards of 350 acres of grazing land, remnant bush and rehabilitated land at Cape Liptrap and have been for 19 years.

But I am Chairman of Melbourne Water, sourcing on average over the past 100 years, 600 billion litres of water per year, from the heart of Gippsland. That water is Melbourne's very life-line.

Of course that volume has been 400 billion litres for the last 10 years and 163 billion litres last year (consuming nearly 435 billion litres last year)

And energy? Melbourne Water is one of the top 15 energy users in Victoria – consuming 208 Gigawatt hours. I do have to say though that we generate 55 Gigawatt hours of our own energy from renewable sources (hydro and bio gas principally) which is equivalent to 41.1% of our use. Next year this will increase to over 65 Gigawatt hours when our new biogas plant comes on line at eastern Treatment Plant.

In fact, the West Gippsland Region provides 95% of Victoria's electricity, 60% of Melbourne's water storage capacity, and 20% of Australia's milk production.

So that means of course we also consume many more tonnes of Gippsland natural resources – coal. We do leave you with the greenhouse gas emissions though – to be fair – 1.8 million tonnes – 55% of the State’s greenhouse gas pollution.

And I don’t mean to leave out other food produced and exported to Melbourne – vegetables, processed foods, meat – Gippsland Natural and Enviro Meat being my personal choices. And then there is the timber and then there is.....but you see what I mean.

On the face of it, Melbourne is a giant vacuum cleaner, consuming much of Gippsland’s natural, grown and manufactured assets.

Of course we could, (inconceivably) move Melbourne to Gippsland and then it would be our water and energy but of course there would be no room for primary production, growing of timber and maybe even water catchments.

Well, that would be a different scenario.

I certainly would not be here celebrating the 2007 Gippsland Natural Resources Report Card in quite the same way – it would be an urbanised catchment.

Instead, the rich variety of natural resources and features of Gippsland are truly valued by Victorians, indeed by Australians and overseas visitors.

Many, many Melbournians have a second home in Gippsland and regard Gippsland as “my other home”. The tree-change, sea-change phenomenon has seen urban communities electing to make Gippsland home. This brings about its own pressures but also benefits many local communities.

And the drawing on Gippsland natural, grown and manufactured assets brings wealth to Gippsland, generating income and jobs – the basis for social cohesion.

Tourism adds over \$3.5 billion dollars to the regional Victorian economy and provides jobs for more than 60,000 people. Gippslanders share a large proportion of this.

This would suggest then that Melbourne and Gippsland are **interdependent**. We need each other.

And you, the people of Gippsland, the stewards of the Gippsland Catchments, you know it too. “Catchment **Health** – Gippsland **Wealth**”.

Without healthy catchments there can be no wealth.

Recent natural events have caused significant impacts – bushfires – the extensive Alpine fires in 2003, the Moondarra fires and this year’s Great Divide fires have impacted on us socially, financially and environmentally. The prolonged drought has taken its toll. Impacts have been beyond Gippsland’s region.

This is a shared problem for Melburnians and Gippslanders. Climate change has shared impacts for all of us.

We can no longer argue that this bit is mine and that bit yours. If we are to meet the challenges in front of us – very serious threats to the health of our catchments and thus our own health, then we must recognise that the problem is owned by us all and to find solutions we must go beyond the concept of blame and individual asset ownership to accept the common ownership of the problems and solutions.

In fact climate impact solutions present very really opportunity for Gippsland. Fuel crops, bio-energy, carbon sinks are options

for us all. Even some of the emerging technologies such as tidal and wave power may prove viable and relevant to Gippsland.

We welcome the very concept of Gippsland Integrated Natural Resources Forum and the Report Card – the fifth such report – that indicates the Condition and Stewardship ratings for 18 critical natural assets across the region.

Because you are taking the big picture approach to managing our resources ... not simply looking at lines on a map ... and shifting responsibility to someone else.

I welcome the transparency that such a report card brings – The Mitchell River has been severely impacted by the 2006-07 fires – with the subsequent rains sending ash slugs down the river, impacting on biodiversity and water quality, yet the stewardship ratings has improved with key stakeholders working together in partnership to address these impacts. I bet there are lots of stories behind that indicator.

Yet the Latrobe Aquifer remains at the worst condition rating of F with no integration of stewardship contributing to a decline in asset condition.

And on the other hand the Prom is in excellent condition and maintains its A4 rating.

Gippsland has the natural assets in abundance.

Melburnians and other Victorians need to draw on them.

Yet the threat of declining natural assets is great – the consequences of inaction unimaginable.

It's our collective responsibility, governments, industry, each one of us, to address the challenge of maintaining and improving Gippsland's natural assets.

And we have to act now.

We're all too **interdependent** to do otherwise.

I thank you for the absolute privilege of being part of this morning's launch and I pledge my support for an integrated approach to managing the basis for Gippsland's wealth – healthy catchments.