

## Soil Services Division

Established in 1990 within the former Soil Conservation Service, Soil Services is a commercial operation within Lands providing soil and water conservation services to both rural and urban clients. Soil Services offers competitive and cost effective services and consultancy to land users for the assessment, development, implementation and promotion of best practice land and water use systems.

### Aims and Objectives

- provide a cost-effective conservation earthmoving service to protect and conserve the soil and water resource of NSW;
- set the industry standard for conservation earthworks design and construction;
- provide a specialist consulting service in environmental protection, resource planning and assessment, environmental engineering and training in soil and water conservation; and
- assist the Department to meet its objective of managing the natural resource of NSW in a sustainable manner.

### Senior Manager

Paul Jones, General Manager

## Range of Services

### Soilworks

Soil Services specialises in the planning, design and construction of soil and water conservation earthworks. These works include:

- Extensive broadacre banking and waterway systems used to contain and divert runoff to stable disposal areas. These works complement conservation farming practices such as reduced and no-tillage to provide effective control of sheet, rill and gully erosion.
- Grade reducing structures, gully head control, shaping and filling to stabilise actively eroding flow lines.
- Farm dams and associated catch banks to harvest and store water for stock and domestic use.
- Mine restoration works, access tracks, poly pipe laying, sand dune shaping and other specialist works.

The majority of clients are rural landholders who recognise the long-term benefit from investing in conservation works programs.

## Soilconsult

Consultancy and contracting services are offered on a fully commercial basis in a broad range of areas associated with environmental protection and rehabilitation. Soil Services' full time works teams and extensive inventory of equipment is well equipped to take plans and designs through to final implementation. This ensures that Soil Services plans and proposals reflect a good understanding of what is both effective and practical. Services offered both within Australia and overseas, have expanded to the following areas:

- resource planning and assessment;
- soil surveying and landscape mapping;
- soil and water testing services;
- catchment and property planning;
- erosion and sediment control on infrastructure developments;
- design and construction of soil and water conservation works;
- groundwater mapping and salinity control;
- vineyard, orchard and feedlot survey and design;
- rehabilitation and revegetation of degraded and disturbed areas;
- flood detention basins, drainage works and artificial wetlands;
- training in conservation earthmoving, urban erosion and sediment control, access track construction and rehabilitation techniques; and
- coastal dune stabilisation and beach reclamation.

### Highlights for 2003-2004

- Active marketing commenced for the division under the Department of Lands banner with a range of new promotional information. Field days at Agquip, Orange and Henty were attended promoting the Lands range of services.
- OH&S was a significant area of activity for Soil Services during the year, following several minor incidents involving heavy plant. Risk assessments and hazard analysis were undertaken and documented for staff on all areas of the division's activities. Standard site assessment reporting was introduced for all construction sites.
- Major environmental rehabilitation consultancies undertaken during the year included:

- Department of Mineral Resources rehabilitation of derelict mine sites across NSW to the value of \$1.03 million.
- Blue Circle Southern Cement Ltd rehabilitation of the Brogan's Creek limestone quarry for \$150,700.
- Department of Education and Training school ground rehabilitation works at eight schools to the value of \$698,000.
- BHP Billiton investigation and rehabilitation of a saline irrigation site at Wilton for \$137,700.
- Sydney Catchment Authority fire trail maintenance works and erosion and sediment control works on catchment properties to the value of \$597,000.
- Four projects for the Roads and Traffic Authority involving batter stabilisation and revegetation works to the value of \$920,000.
- Blue Mountains City Council/EPA creek and streambank stormwater protection works in the Katoomba area to the value of \$244,250.

### Outcomes

Soilworks sales at \$8.56 million (down 10% on the budgeted \$9.5 million), was attributed partly to the ongoing widespread drought conditions and the larger than budgeted fleet reduction. Chargeable plant hours were down 12.6% (1,138 hours) on the 2003/04 high figure of 1,302 hours per unit as drought conditions continued. The fleet reduction of 14% (budgeted 10%) impacted on potential for sales generation. Approximately 30,000 hectares of land was treated with conservation earthworks including broadacre banks, waterways dams and sediment detention structures.

External consultancy sales totalled \$7.73 million (up by 12% on 2002/03) and 16% above the estimated budget for the year, an excellent result. While the majority of clients continue to directly approach Soil Services and request project costings, several large jobs were won in open tender. A three-year contract was won with Goulburn Murray Water for the provision of erosion and sediment catchment control works on the Hume Dam foreshores, (Victorian side). The Department of Mineral Resources tender for the rehabilitation of the old Halls Peak mine north of Armidale was won with a contract value of \$266,600. A successful tender as a subcontractor to Ward Civil for dune stabilisation and revegetation was also won for works at Lady Robinson Beach, Botany Bay, for the Sydney Ports Corporation.

Hunter Valley flood mitigation works, Great North Walking Track and dam foreshore programs were completed during the year to the value of \$2.81 million.

With DIPNR's withdrawal of recurrent funding support to the dam foreshore operations, this area incurred a loss of \$120,000 in 2002/03. Negotiations with State Water, now owners of the properties, are being undertaken to cover operational costs during 2003/04.

The Division's business plan was reviewed, updated and submitted to Treasury in December 2003. A range of strategies in the plan were progressed and accelerated to improve the financial position of the division:

- A market review and a marketing strategy were completed. New marketing material was prepared under the Lands banner and major rural field days attended.
- Soilworks operational costs were decreased through a reduction of the bulldozer fleet from 57 to 50 units. With the leasing of 3 new units, this allowed the disposal of 11 aged units.
- The Nowra Plant Nursery, which was incurring small losses, was closed.
- Seven office locations were consolidated into existing Lands offices at Wagga, Orange, Wellington, Bathurst, Tamworth, Newcastle and Parramatta with a view to reducing long term accommodation costs.
- Workshop and further fleet rationalisation with associated staff reductions were also identified for action in early 2004/05.

### Challenges

The Soilworks operation continues to experience excessive fleet repair costs due to the ageing fleet. While progress was made during the year with the disposal of 11 units, 20 of the remaining 50 units require replacement/disposal.

The profitable Soilconsult operation continues to provide a substantial stream of income for the Division. Without expansion of this section of the operation through the filling of staff vacancies and limited new positions, the financial position of the Division will continue to struggle. These challenges will continue to be addressed in 2004/05.

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LPI Division Financial Statements
Crown Lands Division
<b>Soil Services Division</b>
Office of Rural Affairs
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## Office of Rural Affairs

The Office of Rural Affairs provides support to the Minister for Rural Affairs and Government to achieve the Government's objectives and commitments to the people of New South Wales.

The Office of Rural Affairs largely undertakes this role by providing secretariat and policy support to the Regional Consultative Communities Council (RCCC), which is New South Wales' peak rural advisory body.

The RCCC is an independent body, providing advice on a wide range of community matters and reports to the Premier and the Minister for Rural Affairs.

The Office of Rural Affairs has developed close links with stakeholders and communities across the state. Working within the framework of Government objectives, the Office assists in the identification of issues, policy gaps and opportunities and develops solutions that enhance service provision to the people and communities in country New South Wales.

### Senior Manager

Fran Schonberg, Acting Manager, Office of Rural Affairs

### Financial Performance

The Office of Rural Affairs became part of the Department of Lands in July 2003. The Budget allocation for the Office of Rural Affairs for 2003-2004 was not included within the Department of Lands allocation, but was included in Premier's Department allocation. A full years' financial allocation was subsequently transferred to the Department pursuant to section 24 transfer under the *Public Finance and Audit Act 1983* later in 2003.

The budget allocation for the office includes funds related to the operation of the Regional Communities Consultative Committee (\$150,000) and employee and related operating costs of the Office itself (\$265,000).

No capital works funding was allocated to the Office in 2003-2004.

### The Regional Communities Consultative Council (RCCC)

Established in August 1996, the RCCC is a standing advisory body comprised of thirteen members representing community interests, and chaired by an independent community representative.

Members are appointed for a two year term.

### Council Members and their Role

Diana Gibbs, Chair

Lynda Summers, Deputy Chair & Health Sector Interests

John Ainsworth, representing Farmers' Interests

Rev. Bronwyn Murphy, representing Religious Interests

Michael Schultz, representing Environmental Interests

Dino Zappacosta, representing Ethnic Community Interests

Dr Jock Fletcher, representing Business and Industry Interests

Gerald Moore, representing Aboriginal Community Interests

Michael Madden, representing Trade Union Interests

Laura Daley, representing Youth Interests – resigned 2003

Aleshia Oakenfull, representing Youth Interests

Barry Fowler, representing Social Services Interests – resigned 2004

Jessie Quigley, representing Women's Interests

Jenny Bonfield, representing Local Government Interests

Jean Evans, representing Education Interests

Christine May, representing Education Interests – resigned 2003

## Some Highlights in 2003/2004

### Bringing a rural perspective to the NSW Summit on Alcohol Abuse

A Western Consultation tour, including centres such as Dubbo, Bourke, Brewarrina and Walgett, was arranged for key Summit participants to speak to community members, service providers, Working Parties and Community and Drug Action teams.

### Comment on Lifelong Learning, The Future of Public Education in NSW

Providing feedback on the proposed restructure of public education in NSW, the RCCC noted several issues of concern to rural areas related to proposed restructures. It was highlighted that while changes to educational facilities impacted directly on access to and cost of education, the aggregation of educational services would also have adverse affects upon regional transport, access to support services, work force mobility and human capital of local communities.

## Goals for 2004-2005

### Government Information Rural Communication Strategy

In response to requests across the state for information about accessing State Government information, the RCCC has proposed a rural communication strategy. While a number of Government programs exist to provide access to available information in hard copy and digital forms, comments from rural and regional communities indicate that there exists a degree of confusion about what information is available and where and how information can be accessed.

The RCCC has proposed the formation of a State Government Information Coordination Group, comprising of staff from the Government Access Centres, Community Technology Centres, Government Information Service & Bookshop, NSW Libraries, Service NSW Premier's Department eGovernment, communitybuilders, Office of Rural Affairs, and Regional Communities Consultative Council, to develop and implement a comprehensive communication strategy.

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