

Stage 2 Research Project B – 2021

External Assessment Cover Sheet

Assessment Type 3: Evaluation

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SACE Registration Number:

Research Question: “Has the implementation of a Kangaroo Island Timber Plantation facility, which contains non-endemic Tasmanian Blue Gums, and the company’s actions resulted in significant implications for Kangaroo Island communities and eco-systems?”

Word count: summary 150, written evaluation 1496.

This **evaluation** is assessed using the following specific features:

Synthesis	Evaluation
S3	E1
	E2
	E3

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Evaluation

RESEARCH PROJECT B 2021

“Has the implementation of a Kangaroo Island Timber Plantation facility, which contains non-endemic Tasmanian Blue Gums, and the company’s actions resulted in significant implications for Kangaroo Island communities and eco-systems?”

Summary of the research question and outcome:

My research project, presented as an academic report, investigated implications of Kangaroo Island Plantation Timbers’ (KIPT) actions on Kangaroo Island (KI) communities and ecosystems. Having a personal connection to KI, I examined two of KIPT’s controversial actions; the proliferation of Tasmanian Blue Gums (TBGs) (a non-endemic and invasive species) and proposed Smith Bay timber exportation wharf and haulage route. The *Ravine Wildfires* caused TBG germination beyond KIPT boundaries, which I correlated with damage to endemic ecosystem populations. Research indicated that the Smith Bay wharf and haulage route would reduce endangered marine and terrestrial species populations and significantly impact the local economy and quality of living. Conclusions to the research question were twofold. First, that planting a non-endemic species on KI is imprudent and should cease while KIPT rectifies implications of TBG spread. Second, that the Smith Bay wharf and haulage route is infeasible due to irreparable damage it would cause.

(150 Words)

E1| Evaluation of the Research Processes:

1. Literature review: Public Submissions to Government

During initial stages of research, to identify key implications of the Smith Bay wharf, I looked into public submissions to Government in the form of letters, which are primary sources. This process was the most useful in providing in-depth information about community opinion and various parties’ associated concerns. A plethora of public submissions provided me with comprehensive qualitative and quantitative data, strengthening my understanding and ability to thoroughly address my research question. Credibility of public submission letters differ greatly depending on the individual who composed them, limiting their reliability and use. For example, Charmaine Zealand’s letter (2019), who owns *Molly’s Run accommodation*, is less reliable and valid because she discusses many topics in which she is not an expert, and has not provided sources/references to substantiate information and statistics implemented. I found that the majority of letter submissions were negatively skewed, limiting my ability to properly answer the research question without being biased.

2. Primary Contact: Interview

I undertook an interview in 2021 with an Environmental Sciences scholar from Adelaide University (referred to as ‘ESS’ for privacy reasons) to obtain information from a credible source regarding environmental impacts of the TBG spread. This helped answer the research question by providing a link between two key sub-questions, the introduction of a non-endemic species and ecological impacts. This research process was the most reliable, as ESS is a credible source, possessing a tertiary education and specialising in non-endemic flora species. The source provided me with quantitative statistics pertaining to the TBG sapling removal program they were involved in, which allowed me to substantiate other

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sources’ claims. However, this source was very limited in the amount they could contribute to my research on the Smith Bay wharf and haulage route issue. Furthermore, an additional interview with a marine biologist could have been undertaken to obtain impartial information without disclosing the Smith Bay/KI location, which removes the cultural bias and opinion.

3. Survey Analysis

Following initial research using online resources, I developed a detailed survey and distributed this to various individuals who have publicly expressed opinions on the TBG spread or Smith Bay wharf and haulage route. The survey was distributed to twenty credible experts in respective fields relating to the survey contents, 10 expressing negative opinions regarding KIPT’s actions and 10 positive perspectives. This process was relatively useful in both the developmental research and outcome production phases. In particular, qualitative data pertaining to the social, political, environmental and economic implications endured by local communities due to KIPTs’ actions was comprehensive. This became a fundamental primary source used to identify topics of discussion for my outcome and highlighted KI communities’ contrasting perspectives and inability to reach consensus. For example, when asked whether differing opinions has affected relationships between locals and KIPT, anonymous source 3 (2021) responded, *‘Yes, relationships have been very obviously tested...we haven’t been listened to or respected,’* while anonymous source 7 stated, *‘... KIPT are pro-active in providing information/responding to KI communities.’*

Ethical considerations were employed to protect the identities of participants, reducing credibility of my research. Therefore, information gained from this process was cross-referenced with credible public sources. For example, anonymous survey participant 1 (2021) stated *‘...it is known that the Syngnathidae family suffers population endangerment...protected by the Australian government...’* However, unable to disclose the individuals’ expert credentials, I referred to the *Smith Bay Marine Ecology Report* (2019) by Catherine Larkin, which validated the survey participants’ response by providing detailed information regarding the Syngnathidae family’s status as an endangered, protected species under the *Australian Commonwealth’s Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act (1999)*.

E2| Evaluation of Challenges and Opportunities:

The largest challenge I faced was finding primary sources from KI. Due to the political and social ramifications of discussing KIPT’s actions, many individuals declined my requests for interviews or survey participation. Therefore, the only individuals I could contact were those who had previously expressed their viewpoints publicly. While still useful, this limited the contribution of interviews and surveys to the development of the research question response, as most information provided by these sources was accessible online. To overcome this, I read various publications by the individuals surveyed and produced questions which encouraged expansion upon previously published information.

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Writing my outcome without bias was another challenge, as the sources I obtained mainly consisted of information opposing KIPT’s actions. For example, there was an imbalance of responses from the survey participants, ten adamantly opposing KIPT’s actions and only one in favour. This was challenging to overcome, as those expressing negative opinions were willing to share information with me, whereas those in support were only willing to provide simplistic information which could be found elsewhere, limiting their contributions to my findings. Evidently, this does not represent a true cross-section of the greater KI community and resulted in my research being negatively skewed. This reduced my ability to adequately discuss positive and negative implications pertaining to the research question and is the biggest weakness of my outcome.

Attempting to overcome this, I decided to contact the Managing Director and the KI Seaport Manager of KIPT via a questionnaire to include their perspectives. Containing 28 questions regarding public opinions and impacts on the broader KI community, I asked for responses to my key findings so that I could balance the bias of sources used and ensure KIPT’s input was considered. However, KIPT’s Executive Director of Community Engagement responded answering only 8 questions, avoiding controversial topics and providing no valid information. The credibility of information provided was limited, as experts approached did not respond. This challenge could not be overcome, as continuing to contact KIPT proved futile. KIPT’s responses were invalid and irrelevant to my research, however, contacting KIPT was a pertinent decision. Had I received detailed input from KIPT specialists, it would have increased the validity of my research project and the absence of this is a significant flaw in my research outcome.

Forced to reflect upon my literacy skills, I learned to become more succinct and direct with my communications. To improve the questionnaire and encourage greater response, less sophisticated language could have been employed. Also, questions asking KIPT to respond to public opinion could have been excluded, as this appeared confrontational. The questions could have targeted responses about KIPT’s positive contributions, which would have allowed me to develop a more comprehensive research question response.

The positive implications researched needed to be removed from the final outcome during editing, as they did not relate to the TBG spread or wharf/haulage route development. For example, I initially included a key finding regarding KIPT’s intent to bring another industry to KI to improve economics, job security and financial support of local community groups. While removal of this information increased the negative tone of the research outcome, it was an appropriate decision which ensured information used was relevant and directly contributed to answering the research question.

E3| Evaluation of the Outcome:

In answering the research question, the intended purpose of my outcome was to produce a non-partisan report which thoroughly discussed both positive and negative implications of

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KIPT’s actions. I was successful in undertaking thorough exploration of negative implications, producing an in-depth and clinical response to the research question. Through discussing ecological, social, political, economic and ethical impacts across four key findings, I was able to incorporate a range of qualitative primary sources substantiated by quantitative secondary sources.

Substantiation of key information was another strength of the outcome, as a variety of sources with varying credibility and reliability were cross-referenced and implemented in the report to ensure valid information was included and appropriate resolutions to the research question were drawn. The outcome utilises sophisticated ecological terminology intertwined with understandable explanations. Furthermore, the report can be viewed by audiences of varying occupations and education levels.

However, despite these strengths, weaknesses limiting the effectiveness of the outcome are identifiable. Limited available sources reduced my ability to provide positive implications and develop a well-rounded response to the research question. Sources in favour of KIPT’s actions, including KIPT’s perspective itself, would further improve the quality and reliability of my research by ensuring all relevant parties contributed.

Two intended groups, eco-conscious KI locals and KIPT, were the initial target audience for my research outcome. However, unable to develop an unbiased report, I concluded that eco-conscious KI locals would not benefit from my research. The report does not provide impartial information, meaning they would not get a wholistic understanding of the topic. Instead, findings surrounding implications of proliferating TBGs would be highly beneficial for those researching commercial farming of non-endemic species. Findings about marine implications associated with the Smith Bay wharf, would be particularly useful for researchers investigating impacts of human-made infrastructures on endangered and protected marine species. My outcome remains highly valuable to KIPT, as the analysis of various individuals’ concerns will allow the company to consider and confront each issue to reduce implications of their actions for KI communities and ecosystems and reduce negative attention.

(1496 Words)

Bibliography:

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