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## **VIABLE RURAL COMMUNITIES- A PLATFORM FOR SUSTAINABLE NATURAL RESOURCE AND ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT IN THE WESTERN CATCHMENT, NSW**

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A study has been undertaken to model the socio-economic framework of the Western Catchment of NSW and to explore opportunities to secure a viable economic future. The baseline data shows a steady decline in economic performance by most properties and communities in the catchment caused by the compounding effects of sustained low commodity prices and poor seasonal conditions during the last decade. The effects of four strategic intervention scenarios were modeled to determine if the socio-economic outlook could be improved over the next twenty years. The four scenarios were: farm diversification; telecommunication improvements; enhanced learning and education opportunities; and, natural resource management. The probably effects of a “do nothing” scenario were also explored, and indicated that communities within the catchment would continue to decline due to changes in the scale of property management from largely single family units to large corporate entities.

In its intervention scenarios, the study identified a number of strategic investment opportunities which could improve the socio-economic situation for the catchment. This is consistent with the conclusions from other studies and reviews.

The study demonstrates the possibilities for sustainable management of the catchment’s natural resources by viable rural communities. This can be achieved if the planning environment is integrated across the whole social structure of the catchment (the people of the region determine their own desired vision) and inclusive of all sectors of the community, including government.