

Proposal for 768 Big River Road, Locotta, Flinders Island

Historical view of 'Big River' farmstead from the East, surrounded by cleared paddocks, circa 1970.



There are very few truly productive small-scale producers on Flinders Island. Indeed, in a recent survey by Sprout Tasmania, only one local small-scale producer (Byworth Farm) contributed. The main problem faced by small-scale production on Flinders Island is articulated in section 4.1.2 of the recent January 2022 LPS report:

“Water for irrigation is likely, but it depends on the farm business activity and the region. On Flinders Island water for irrigation is less likely. The cost of developing irrigation water resources is likely to be one of the limiting factors in the choice of farming activity for Small Scale Producers.”
(LPS, 2022; 4.1.2)

The catchment area of water from the Strzelecki National Park means that the land at 'Big River' has a ready, year-long, consistent supply of water. We believe this will enable successful cultivation and small-scale production of high value products generated from enterprises that will be novel to the island. As the title deeds for all the properties that the river runs through are in our ownership, there is no constraint regarding the requirement that the development should not impact other parties and is in keeping with the (Flinders LPS Rural Enterprise Concept Report) report that:

Pasture based agricultural activities need to be protected where they have the potential to contribute to commercial scale agricultural use

Existing and potential irrigation water resources need to be protected for agricultural use, with the priority being commercial scale use

4.1.2 January 2022

The Enterprise Scale Report (4.1.3 January 2022) states that:

Enterprise Scale Analysis reflects the economic realities of agricultural land use by recognising the influencing characteristics that determine whether the land is used or is likely to be utilised for agriculture through agglomeration with other surrounding titles or individually. Land and water resources suitable for agriculture are a limited resource. Enterprise Scale Analysis provides the rationale behind consistent application of the terms 'agricultural use' and 'agricultural land', thereby providing for the opportunity to protect land and water that has the potential to contribute to the agricultural output of a region, through planning. Enterprise Scale Analysis also assists with identification of those titles with resources that are already compromised for agricultural use to be able to apply the appropriate planning response, to allow for alternative uses.

Vineyards, orchards or berries are likely to be at least 10ha-20ha and likely more. Land area is generally comprised of a number of titles farmed together. Irrigation is generally necessary for smaller land areas to be viable and/or for higher value products.

Key determinants as to the long-term viability of a farm business activity on a smaller title will likely be access to water resources, whether it is farmed in conjunction, surrounding constraints, location in terms of access to markets and labour, scope for expansion or diversification and whether there are other non-agricultural activities associated with the operation (for example café or off-farm income). Where the agricultural activity has potential for long-term viability the appropriate zone is the Agricultural zone. Where it is constrained in a significant way and supports mixed use, the more appropriate zone is generally the Rural zone.

Prepared for Town Planning solutions on behalf of Flinders Island Council

The 'Big River' Farm as a viable commercial venture.

The 'Big River' land area is 321 acres, a sizeable tract which conforms to the Agricultural Land Mapping Project (Dept of Justice, 2017) defined minimum threshold title sizes that could potentially sustain a standalone agricultural farm business activity. This means that potential enterprises in 'Big River' could make a genuine contribution to the economic prosperity of the island.

Additionally, the property is a previously established farming area, having been a successful dairy farm running a herd of cattle prior to the closing of the Butter Factory on Flinders Island in 1974. Evidence of this activity is found in the existing farmhouse, shed, and multiple concrete footprints remaining on the title/terrain, which were the site of previous dairy, chook and pig sheds. There was also a large barn – which still stands - to the west of the farmhouse, although it is now grown over with bush. Both sides of the river were originally cleared.

Originally owned by the Robinson family, the dairy farm was run by Raymond Keith (aka "Feathers") Robinson.

Statement from Kevin 'KR' Robinson (Appendix 1)

"I was born and raised at Big River after I was born in 1947. My Father Raymond Keith Robinson purchased Big River before I was born from Mr Syd Nelson, I don't know the date. While living at Big River we milked 35-45 cows and supplied cream to the Flinders Island

Butter Factory. We also reared pigs and fed the excess milk to them after the cream was separated.

All of the farm had an 8 wire ringlock fence around it to keep the game out. It was subdivided into 12 or 13 paddocks. Approximately 150m South-East from the homestead was the dairy, the cement slab is still visible. To the west of the homestead about 200m was the barn, some of the structure is still there.

Nearing Big River approaching from the West, looking east descending down the incline you can see [where] the virgin scrub meets the other shrubs which was the eastern boundary. My parents sold Big River to Mr Frank Matthews in the mid 1960s.”

Kevin M Robinson 01-02-2022

Statement from Leigh Matthews, son of Frank Matthews (Appendix 2)

“The farm at Big River Flinders Island was purchased by my father Frank Mathews and four other partners. The date of the sale was the mid to late sixties. I have not got the exact date. Maybe the council have the date in their archives. The farm was purchased from Keith Robinson. The property was a working dairy and pig farm. The farm was fenced, and ‘roo’ proofed. It had approximately thirteen to fourteen paddocks, it ran thirty to forty dairy cows.

After the sale the stock was sold, and the property was used by the family as a holiday farm. After a few years it was sold (I’m not sure how many years). I believe it was sold to Wally Gorrell. Since that time the farm was not maintained and went back to scrub.”

Leigh Matthews 30.01.2022

Photographic evidence of commercial activity.

The following image is a historical photograph showing the old farmhouse set within managed pasture.



The following three photos are taken from the razorback (a mountain ridge at the back of the property) from approx. 1980. Rewilding on the Eastern side of the river had already started to take place.





Earlier maps based on field reconnaissance additionally prove that the area was cleared; the cleared area of the valley is highlighted in yellow below.

The following is extracted from P. G Ladd, D.W. Orchiston and E.B. Joyce (New Phytol. 1992:757-767)

Figure 1. Vegetation map of Flinders Island based on field reconnaissance and aerial photographs from 1974.

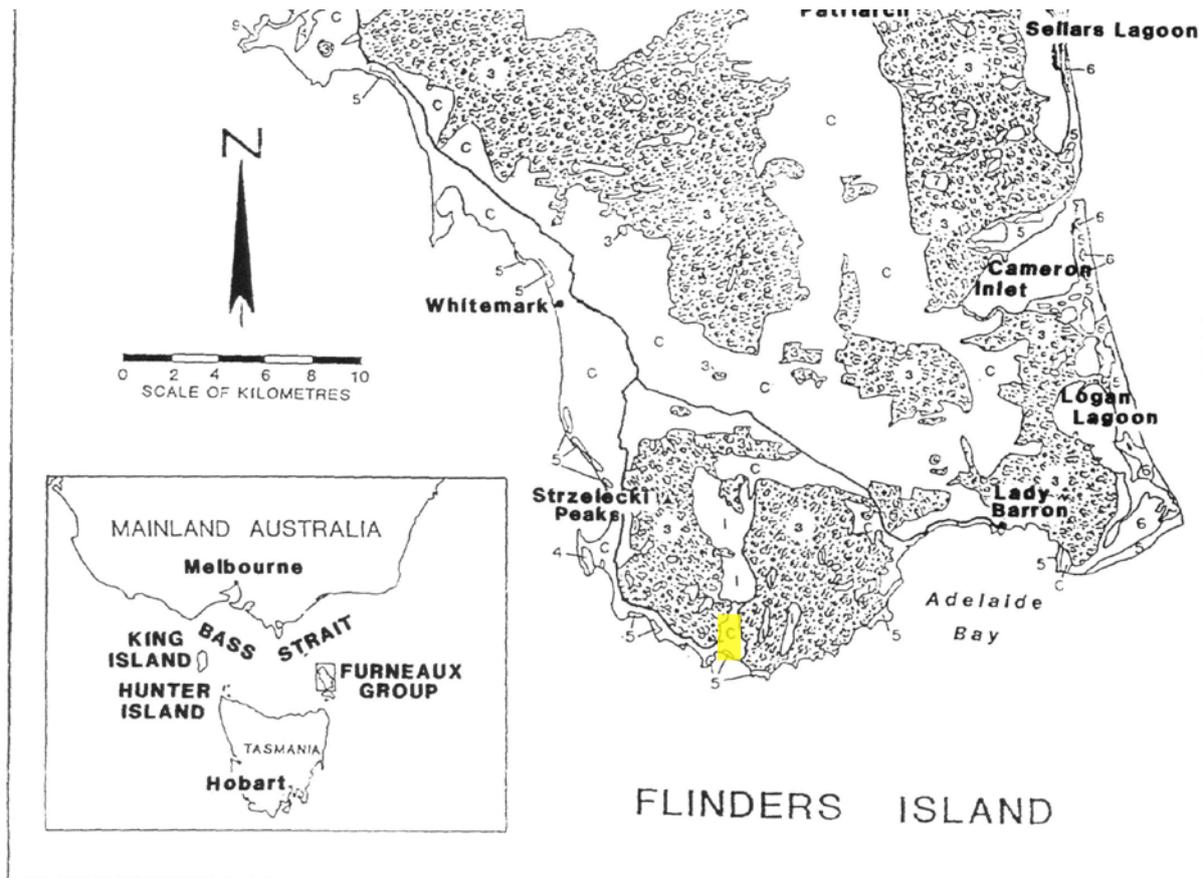


Figure 1. Vegetation map of Flinders Island based on field reconnaissance and 1974 aerial photographs. Locations shown are mentioned in the text. Inset shows location of Flinders Island.

2. Proposed commercial development

We have the intention of becoming a true commercial “small-scale” grower. Our focus will be to produce niche, high-value products suitable for export. We will use income from this to support a diversification strategy that will benefit the local community.

The site’s relative isolation from the main farming areas on Flinders Island means we should be able to achieve organic status for the farm, fitting the overall philosophy of our proposed development and contributing to the sustained ecological protection and growth of the natural environment.

Importantly, the farm is inaccessible from the north of the property due to the Strzelecki mountain range; access along the coast road is also limited. This gives it the important biosecurity factor necessary to gain a licence for the production and processing of products for medicinal purposes.

Diversification: a 'forest garden' for Flinders Island

Organic permaculture centre

Our primary interest is to invest in the land, which is highly suited to development as an organic permaculture centre with a large-scale forest-garden greenhouse, producing fruits and plants that presently/currently do not grow on the island. The idea is to develop a processing facility to grow a 'food forest' for Flinders Island and Cape Barren Island, supplying inhabitants with locally-grown organic food. The residents of Cape Barren, in particular, suffer a shortage of fresh fruit and vegetables, and would benefit greatly from such an enterprise, especially as the farm is proximate to Cape Barren Island.

Production would be diverse, including:

Orchard fruits e.g. avocados, olives, apples, cherries and other stone fruits
Berry fruits
Controlled environment horticulture
Vegetables/market gardens

This fundamental commercial enterprise will support a range of other, secondary, enterprises such as:

Manuka Honey production

Organic vineyard

There are good limestone soils/geology on the site that are suited to vineyards, like the Unavale vineyard to the east of the site.

Micro-Brewery/Distillery

Boutique on-site production/processing of craft beer and spirits using Big River water and products grown on the farm.

Boutique cheese production

Small buffalo, goat herd or dairy cows – as in keeping with previous use of the land - including accepting local produce (milk) from others on the island. Boutique on-site production/processing of milk and products containing milk for a product such as mozzarella.

Kunzea

The Kunzea plant flourishes in the natural environment of 'Big River' and would lend itself well to immediate development. Reducing the height of the Kunzea, for example, would open up vistas which may suit a low-level scenic walking trail, augmented with sculptural

works by local, Australian and international artists. Further potential aspects of the Kunzea development would include:

Kunzea oil farming
Kunzea oil cultivation

Boutique on-site production/processing into products containing Kunzea.
In an initial step, therefore, we would welcome the opportunity to work with local producers to sustainably manage the Kunzea on the property.

There are examples of similar diversified ventures in other regional areas of Australia.

Fair Harvest Permaculture Margaret River

<https://www.fairharvest.com.au>

Central Rocky Mountain Permaculture Institute <https://crmpi.org>

<https://foodforest.com.au/about-us/permaculture/>

We hope we will be supported in our proposed start-up venture and development of the property over our lifetimes - a regeneration of the existing terrain will utilise the unique spatial and water properties of the blocks of land at 'Big River'.

Hoping for a positive response to enable a venture that would enhance and contribute to the island's infrastructure, we remain,

Yours faithfully

Alex and Jenny John

6 Munro Place
Whitemark
Flinders Island 7255
0492 978 930

KEVIN ROBINSON
217 LADY BARRON RD.
WHITEMARK
FLINDERS ISLAND

1.2.2022

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN
RE. CHANGING BIG RIVER FARM FROM A
RURAL ZONE TO CONSERVATION ZONE, I AM
TOTALLY AGAINST IT.

I WAS RAISED AT BIG RIVER AFTER I
WAS BORN IN 1947.

MY FATHER RAYMOND KEITH ROBINSON
PURCHASED BIG RIVER BEFORE I WAS BORN
FROM MR. SYD NELSON, I DON'T KNOW THE DATE.

WHILE LIVING AT BIG RIVER WE
MILKED 35-45 COWS AND SUPPLIED CREAM
TO THE FLINDERS IS. BUTTER FACTORY. WE
ALSO RAISED PIGS AND FED THE EXCESS MILK
TO THEM AFTER THE CREAM WAS SEPERATED

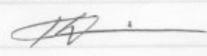
ALL OF THE FARM HAD AN 8 WIRE
RINGLOCK FENCE AROUND IT TO KEEP
THE GAME OUT. IT WAS SUBDIVIDED
INTO 12 OR 13 PADDOCKS.

APPROXIMATELY 150 METERS SOUTH EAST
FROM THE HOMESTEAD WAS THE DAIRY,
THE CEMENT SLAB IS STILL VISIBLE.

TO THE WEST FROM THE HOMESTEAD ABOUT 200 METERS WAS THE BARN, SOME OF THE STRUCTURE IS STILL THERE,

NEARING BIG RIVER APPROACHING FROM THE WEST, LOOKING EAST DESCENDING DOWN THE INCLINE YOU CAN SEE THE VIRGIN SHRUB MEETS THE OTHER SHRUB WHICH WAS THE EASTERN BOUNDARY.

MY PARENTS SOLD BIG RIVER TO MR. FRANK MATHEWS IN THE MID 1960's.

YOURS SINCERELY
KEVIN M ROBINSON


Witnessed by,

Ri Alexander Rudi Ili,
Flanders Island.

01-02-2022

To Whom it May Concern

THE FARM Big River Fenwick Is was Purchased By
my father FRANK MATTHEW & FOUR OTHER PARTNERS.
THE DATE OF THE SALE WAS THE MID TO LATE
SIXTYS.

I HAVE NOT GOT THE EXACT DATE. MAYBE
THE COUNCIL HAVE DATE IN THEIR ARCHIVES.
THE FARM WAS PURCHASED FROM SIM ROBERTSON
THE PROPERTY WAS A WORKING DAIRY & PIC FARM.
THE FARM WAS FENCED AND FLOO PROOFED IT
APPROX. WAS THIRTEEN TO FORTY PADDOCKS. IT
RAN THIRTY TO FORTY DAIRY COWS.

AFTER THE SALE THE STOCK WAS SOLD AND
THE PROPERTY WAS USED BY FIVE FAMILYS AS A
HOLIDAY FARM.

AFTER A FEW YEARS IT WAS SOLD (I'M NOT
SURE HOW MANY YEARS)

I BELIEVE IT WAS SOLD TO WALLY CROVELL
SINCE THEN THE FARM WAS NOT MAINTAINED AND
WENT BACK TO SCRUB.

Loren Matthews



30.1.22



2 February 2022

A & J John
768 Big River Rd
Flinders Island TAS 7255

Dear Alex and Jenny

Flinders Draft Local Provisions Schedule – Prehearing Submission

Further to your submitted representation and attached information demonstrating the historical use of the land, in anticipation of attendance and presentation to the Tasmanian Planning Commission hearing for the Flinders Draft Local Provisions Schedule on 9 February 2022, I provide the following to assist with consideration of your representation matters:

As discussed, the Landscape Conservation Zone does not adequately address the historic circumstances of your property or your intended future use of the property. However, the Tasmanian Planning Scheme provides opportunity for the inclusion of site-specific qualifications to enable future consideration of uses you are intending to conduct on the property.

In accordance with the prescribed format of the Tasmanian Planning Scheme and the exhibited written document, the proposed site-specific qualification submitted for the property is:

Reference Number	Site Reference	Folio of the Register	Description (modification, substitution or addition)	Relevant Clause in State Planning Provisions
FLI-22.4	768 Big River Road, Loccota	164303/1 and 164303/2	Additional Discretionary uses for this site are: (a) Resource Processing if associated with Resource Development on 164303/1, 164303/2 and 164303/3; and (b) General Retail and Hire if associated with:	Landscape Conservation Zone - Clause 22.2 Use Table

			(i) Resource Development on 164303/1, 164303/2 and 164303/3; or (ii) art and craft products.	
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Section 32(3) of the *Land Use Planning & Approvals Act* (the Act) 1993 provides that a LPS may include a Particular Purpose Zone, Specific Area Plan or Site-Specific Qualification.

Section 32(4) of the Act requires that the inclusion of any of these provisions in a LPS must demonstrate that:

- (a) a use or development to which the provision relates is of significant social, economic or environmental benefit to the State, a region or a municipal area; or*
- (b) the area of land has particular environmental, economic, social or spatial qualities that require provisions, that are unique to the area of land, to apply to the land in substitution for, or in addition to, or modification of, the provisions of the SPPs.*

A brief discussion of the relevant criteria for consideration at the hearing is as follows:

Section 32(4)(a)

As outlined in *Table 2 Flinders Council Strategy and LPS Response* of the Council's supporting report, relating to the Council's Strategic Plan, the strategy is to *value add to local commodities and foster entrepreneurial activity*. Whilst the response mainly relates to the introduction of the Rural Living Zone, the report acknowledges that larger lots provide *opportunities for small business associated with producing and value adding to the local economy and fostering entrepreneurial activity*.

The report identifies four strategic outcomes:

- To protect the grazing industry;
- To encourage diversification in agriculture on rural land not being grazed;
- To support and encourage sustainable tourism growth; and
- To maintain and enhance the Flinders Island quality of life.

Due to the relative isolation of Flinders Island, economic diversification plays a greater role than it otherwise might in supporting the municipal economy. This is not only recognised at the local level in strategic documents, but also in the Northern Tasmania Regional Land Use Strategy.

In this regard, given the change of zoning proposed for the land in the Draft LPS and the subsequent reduction in allowable land uses from those provided for in the prior planning scheme, a site-specific qualification that provides opportunity to consider uses that diversify and value-add to the use of land at 768 Big River Road, considering its Resource Development use history, provides a significant potential economic benefit to the municipal area in accordance with criteria 32(4)(a).

Section 32(4)(b)

Spatial and Environmental Qualities:

As demonstrated in your documentation, the property has historically been cleared and used for primary production, which is evident in the spatial arrangement of the building cluster and access driveway within an area of heavily modified vegetation.

The land is unique in the Loccota area in this regard, with other properties exhibiting a far lesser degree of historic disturbance, most private land being utilised for residential, lifestyle purposes within proximity to the coast and the dominating presence of the Strzelecki National Park to the north and west. The historic land use of the site and modified environment is a spatial anomaly reflected in the TPS overlays, which enable appropriate consideration of uses that the Landscape Conservation Zone otherwise would not.

As such, the land has spatial and environmental qualities that warrant the inclusion of unique provisions in a site-specific qualification that provides for additional uses that support the stated strategic objectives for Flinders Island.

Economic Qualities:

As discussed above and in your documentation, the land has economic qualities in the potential availability of water from Big River, together with the soil type, that supports opportunities for agriculture and horticulture and associated value-added enterprises. The amenity aspects of the location adjoining the coast augments opportunities for local production and food related tourism that are known destination drivers in tourism demand.

The convergence of the environmental characteristics of the land described above in a high-amenity location creates an economic quality that should be given opportunity to be enhanced in the future. This is achieved through a site-specific qualification that provides for additional uses supporting value-adding and tourism in accordance with the stated strategic objectives for Flinders Island.

I trust that this will assist consideration at the Commission hearing.

Yours faithfully/sincerely



Jo Oliver
Director