

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE

INQUIRY INTO PUBLIC GOOD CONSERVATION

SUBMITTED BY:

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BACKGROUND

The Condamine Catchment Committee formed in September 1992 (later incorporated as the Condamine Catchment Management Association or CCMA) as a result of community consultation on how ICM might be implemented in the Queensland section of the Murray-Darling Basin. The Committee is made up of 10 community members (skills-based selection), and 4 special members (Department of Natural Resources, Department of Primary Industries, Environmental Protection Agency and the Darling Downs Local Government Association).

The submission will focus on the four key areas identified for the inquiry.

- **The impact on landholders and farmers in Australia of public-good conservation measures imposed by either State or Commonwealth Governments**

Landholders and farmers are under increasing pressure to meet personal economic demands. We, in south-west Queensland have found the use of financial incentives to be of great importance when attempting to secure areas for public good conservation.

A number of programs have been initiated in southwest Queensland, funded with the aid of the Natural Heritage Trust to assist in the identification of land with conservation and biodiversity values. The provision of a financial incentive has promoted a number of landholders to allocate resources to conserve key parcels of remnant native vegetation, riparian corridors and to manage lands at risk of land degradation.

The provision of a financial incentive for such activities has been an essential element enabling these projects to achieve their objectives. The access of funds for such activities has provided an additional benefit - promoting the provision of resources by landholders for complementary activities such as pest plant and animal control.

Another core component of these projects has been the establishment of project officers who are locally accessible to provide extension advice.

The impact on landholders and farmers in Australia of public-good conservation measures imposed by either State or Commonwealth Governments can be mitigated to some extent if supplementary arrangements are also established such as financial incentives coupled with local access to advice and information. It is essential for this

to be addressed if government continues to place increasing demands on land managers to retain area for public good causes such as mitigating salinity, retaining remnant vegetation and re-establishing wildlife corridors.

- **Policy measures adopted internationally to ensure the cost of public good conservation measures are ameliorated for private landholders.**

We strongly support the development and adoption of international measures to ensure the costs of public good conservation measures are ameliorated for private landholders as long as they are adequately resourced and mechanisms are established to ensure values are appropriately determined.

Policies adopted internationally provide a great opportunity for measures to be implemented that are consistent across the nation. However, support for private landholders needs to be provided in return for landholders foregoing potential earning opportunities. This may be in the form of financial incentives, tax rebates and/or marketing measures that may improve the returns of produce, which has some sort of accreditation attached to it, recognising the contribution made at a property level.

In the UK they have adopted a process to make conservation part of farming and land management practice by offering payments that improve the natural heritage of the countryside. This could also be adopted in Australia, as it would ease the financial burden of many private landholders.

- **Appropriate mechanisms to establish private and public-good components of Government environment conservation measures.**

It is essential that processes are established to enable landholders and land managers to clearly identify conservation values associated with any chosen parcel of land. Only recently, with the support of the Federal government has specialist advice/knowledge at the property scale become available. It is interesting to note that these resources are in ever-increasing demand as they become more visible and accessible in the region.

Property level information also needs to be continually updated and considered on a landscape scale to ensure that decisions are being made based on potential cumulative impacts. Resources need to be provided to establish locally relevant, up-to-date maps, which clearly indicate areas of conservation value.

It is increasingly evident that local government have a key role to play in implementing measures to retain areas for public good conservation. It is also evident in this region that they do not have the resources available to adequately determine conservation values within their shire and to recognise them in their planning schemes. One mechanism to enhance their decision making process is for the state and federal government to recognise catchment strategies thus ensuring their consideration at the local level.

Additional work is also required to clearly establish economic and ecological values of particular types of land to be retained for public good conservation. The economic component of this equation is clearly lacking. Documentary evidence of what benefits are provided and what incentives are available for private landholders to adopt nature conservation measures, would promote better, more-informed decisions being made.

Increasing research in areas where the results can be translated and seen to be relevant to private landholders is also very important. In south-west Queensland we

are seeing increasing involvement by landholders in research activities on their properties.

- **Recommendations, including potential legislative and constitutional means to ensure that costs associated with public-good conservation measures are shared equitably by all members of the community.**

Legislation is often seen as an adversarial tool and mechanisms for implementation must be adequately resourced.

Benefits for incentives such as carbon offsets for trading are receiving great interest in southwest Queensland. This is something that could be further enhanced.

The promotion of the benefits of conservation is critical to influencing private attitudes and values. Ways have to be found so that landholders required protect areas for conservation become proud of the fact that they have a special natural resource on their farms. Education of the values, management techniques and community awareness cannot be underestimated in this respect.

A method to improve community awareness and ownership may be to make information available to landholders and the local community about their areas that have conservation status. This could be achieved through public acknowledgement, recognising their actions to be custodians of important species. Another mechanism may be to increasingly utilise the skills at the landholder level such as their knowledge of native plants and animals and how they interact.

Another highly successful process in southwest Queensland is the sub-catchment action planning process. This establishes a partnership approach to encourage ownership of natural resource management issues. Sub-catchment action plans are developed to address issues and to coordinate local actions. Increasingly biodiversity issues are being incorporated into these plans and joint actions are determined.

Finally, Local Government are potentially a key player in this process as they are managers of public land and are responsible for land use planning. Local government can make a substantial and direct contribution to conservation by ensuring conservation values are adequately determined and considered in risk management strategies, land use planning and management.

Yours sincerely

(Original Signed)

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