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Committee Secretary  
Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600  
AUSTRALIA

**Inquiry into public good conservation - Impact of environmental measures imposed on landholders.**

Dear Committee Secretary

This submission addresses the possible impacts that a lack of financial incentives can have on the distribution of private properties voluntarily protecting vegetation either by binding or non-binding means.

The findings are the result of an honours thesis into the distribution and attributes of 'private land conservation properties' in Victoria in 1998 (copy attached). 'Private land conservation properties' included Trust for Nature (Victoria) reserves, properties with a Trust for Nature conservation covenant placed on the title, and properties with Land for Wildlife accreditation.

Of particular relevance to this inquiry is the relatively large number of such properties around the outer suburban areas of Ballarat, Bendigo and Greater Melbourne (particularly to the east and northeast) with conservation covenant and Land for Wildlife 'hotspots' around Hurstbridge, Upper Beaconsfield and Wonga Park. These three localities were found by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to have amongst the highest household income rate in Victoria (excluding individual suburbs within the Melbourne metropolitan area). While an individual analysis of the income of the owners of such properties was not undertaken, it can be deduced that such landowners are likely to earn their income away from their properties and can therefore afford to 'protect' its natural values in some form.

Another finding which could also be related to the financial position of the landowner is the preference for use of the non-binding Land for Wildlife program to 'protect' native grasslands, as opposed to conservation covenants bound to the title in perpetuity. While 184 grassland sites were managed as Land for Wildlife in April 1998, only one was

protected with a covenant. Whilst farmers may recognise the value of and be sympathetic to the protection of native grassland, the economic constraints on effectively 'locking up' a part of productive farmland could be too great. Even though controlled grazing may still be allowed on a covenanted grassland, a currently depressed wool market and the push for greater economic returns through cropping maybe still be too inhibitive.

Numerous papers have been written and you will no doubt receive numerous submissions on the inadequacy of current financial incentives for private land conservation in Australia. The above two findings illustrate that the lack of such incentives could in fact have a real impact on the distribution of private properties actively protecting vegetation and of the vegetation types being protected.

Yours faithfully

James Fitzsimons

Attached:

Fitzsimons, J.A. (1999) *Habitat Conservation on Private Land: Roles and Relationships in Victoria*. Unpublished Honours thesis. School of Ecology and Environment, Deakin University, Melbourne.