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Contact: Bernie Dunn
Date: 28 August, 2000

The Secretary
House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Environment & Heritage
Parliament House
Canberra, ACT, 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

Thankyou for the opportunity to provide information to the Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage Inquiry into public good conservation – Impact of environmental measures imposed on landholders.

The Wimmera Catchment Management Authority has the responsibility to implement the Wimmera Regional Catchment Strategy. One of the major aims of that Strategy is to ensure there is a net gain in indigenous vegetation in the Wimmera which is to be achieved through increased revegetation activities and reduced clearing. A sub-committee of the WCMA has recently developed a Vegetation Plan for the Wimmera.

Wimmera Native Vegetation Plan

The plan has been developed following the Wimmera Regional Catchment Strategy and aims to provide the strategic direction for native vegetation management in the Wimmera Catchment Region. The Draft Wimmera Native Vegetation Plan will be released for public consultation on August 22, 2000.

Sustainable management of existing native vegetation throughout the Wimmera Catchment Region is a high priority. The need for sustainable management of native vegetation is reinforced by the recommended actions in the strategy for the protection of flora.

This plan has the major goals to:

- extend the extent of all native vegetation types from 2000 levels in keeping with the goal of a Net Gain as per Victoria's Native Vegetation Management Framework,
- enhance the quality of existing native vegetation by managing 90% of native vegetation cover on private land and 100% on public land according to best management practice by 2010
- increase the viability of threatened species and the extent and quality of threatened ecological communities
- increase community understanding of native vegetation issues and motivate them to make a contribution to improving management.

The primary priorities in the plan are based on the percentage of each Broad Vegetation Type (BVT, *a system of classifying native vegetation*) that has already been cleared. That is, the greater the clearing the higher the priority. Secondary priorities are detailed in the plan based on biodiversity & conservation values and land and water protection values.

In the case of West Wimmera Shire, approximately 6.2% of private land still retains native vegetation. If only the BVT is considered, there is the scope to undertake some

development in the area. However, the BVT's most at threat provide habitat and seasonal food sources for a nationally significant endangered species, the Red-tail Black Cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus banksii*). The irony is that the vegetation communities, particularly Brown Stringybark, are on poor quality soils that will not be very productive for cropping, grazing or agroforestry.

Land Stewardship

Land Stewardship is defined as using and managing natural resources within it's capabilities (to meet local and broader community values)

The WCMA fully supports the recognition and compensation to landholders who manage areas of native vegetation on private land for the benefit of the broader community.

In recognition of this a recent Wimmera CMA workshop was held recently to accelerate the implementation of Land Stewardship in the region. The workshop held in April 2000 involved 25 people including local Farmers, CMA representatives and NRE representatives from across Victoria, Murray Darling Basin Commission Staff, Deakin and LaTrobe University Researchers and the Productivity Commission. The focus of this was on Steep Hill Country, however the principles can apply to areas of native vegetation across the region.

The Aims of workshop were to share knowledge and experience in 'retirement' of steep hills, define 'land stewardship' and agree on the concept, describe what we are ultimately trying to achieve via 'land stewardship' and scope a process for implementation of 'land stewardship' of steep hills.

The outcomes of this workshop are now being included into a Victorian Statewide Framework for Land Stewardship.

Vegetation and Vegetation Management in the West Wimmera Shire.

According to our records there is 41 754 ha or 6.2% of private land in the West Wimmera Shire which is native vegetation. This also includes 1,2 & 3 chain roadsides.

A significant Shire contribution would be to introduce Local Shire rate relief for landholders with larger tracts remnant vegetation on their properties. WCMA has worked with neighbouring Hindmarsh Shire to introduce such a scheme and has offered to assist West Wimmera Shire attract resources to initiate and administer a rate rebate scheme.

If you require further details regarding this information please do not hesitate to contact me at this office.

Yours sincerely

JOHN YOUNG
Chief Executive