

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

Rei Beumer
c/- DLWC
PO Box 136
FORBES NSW 2871

25TH May 2000

Re: Inquiry into the Impact of Environmental Measures Imposed on Landholders

This is a private submission and does not necessarily reflect, or intends to reflect, the position or attitude of the Department for which I work. I am employed by the NSW Department of Land and Water Conservation in Forbes. During my time with the Department, I have held the positions of Coordinator for the Jemalong Land and Water Management Plan, Executive Officer of the Lachlan River Management Committee, and am currently the Natural Resources Planning Officer for the Lachlan Catchment. I have a degree in Applied Science (Conservation and Park Management), a Graduate Diploma in Education (Secondary) and am currently studying for a Graduate Diploma of Natural Resources Law and Policy.

In each of the positions I have held with the Department of Land and Water Conservation, I have dealt extensively with landholders, farmers and graziers, local communities, industry and Local Government on conservation and environmental management matters. The impact of conservation measures on landholders and farmers in particular is very evident and the perception that the rural sector is bearing the brunt for the rest of the community is quite strong. As a result there is a considerable feeling of resentment within rural communities.

In this submission I wish to address the last of the Committee's Terms of Reference which deals with the equitable sharing of costs associated with public-good conservation measures by all members of the community.

It is of some concern that the major factor limiting the scale, scope and the effectiveness of environmental/conservation initiatives, and research pertaining thereto, is the lack of funding. Irrespective of the apparent efficacy of any scheme or plan, if **recurrent** funds are not available for effective and full implementation on ground, that scheme or plan is virtually useless. Unfortunately, this is the frustrating, existing situation. Currently funds for conservation and the environment are provided from State and Federal budgets, or from 'one-off' sales, e.g. Telstra, and are dependant on the political whim at the time and the perceived priority of the need of funding for other issues. As a consequence, any funds provided for the environment limit the funds available for other traditional, high priority areas such as health and education or, conversely, environmental funds, if any, will come from what is left after the allocation of funds to those traditional areas.

Environmental issues are gaining an increasingly high profile and are playing an escalating role in political decision making. Potential environmentally devastating issues such as the future effects of dryland salinity have recently been given prominence in the media. Given the national and the international communities' concerns over these issues and issues such as the hole in the ozone layer and the greenhouse effect, the impact of the environmental role in the political arena is in an upward spiral. International pressure through the courts or through trade sanctions has been and will continue to be used to further the environmental cause. There are strong indications that the first step towards the **ability** to deal with such issues **effectively** is to establish a **recurrent** source of funding specifically for the environment.

It is submitted that an Environmental Levy be imposed, on a similar basis as the Medicare Levy, to establish an Environmental Fund. The levy should be of a magnitude such as to be 'palatable' to the general community e.g. ½%, and must be enshrined in legislation. Such a levy would have the following immediate benefits:

- It would spread the cost of conservation/environmental measures across the whole community.
- It would provide recurrent funds for conservation/environmental measures including research.
- It would enable the effective implementation of on-ground works at the necessary scales.
- It would provide for the allocation of resources, unhampered by a lack of funds, to high priority areas.
- It would free up funding for other, non environmental, high priority areas such as health and education.
- It would enable the establishment and implementation of realistic, strategic, long-term environmental plans.
- It could provide a blue print for environmental management for use or referral by others.
- It would establish Australia as a nation dedicated to addressing environmental issues.

Such a Fund, by virtue of its magnitude, must be managed by a regulatory Authority. Such an Authority, amongst others, should include the following characteristics.

- The Authority should be apolitical (possibly on a similar basis as the MDBC)
- Appointment to the Authority should be merit based and apolitical.
- Its operations must be 'transparent'.
- Its use and disbursement of funds must be 'transparent' and accountable.

Currently, the process to access environmental funds, e.g. NHT, is unnecessarily complex, time consuming and resource hungry, particularly at the 'grass roots' level. Any process established to access the proposed Environmental Fund should be;

- simple,

- accountable,
- transparent, and
- readily accessible.

The imposition of such a levy and the establishment of an Environmental Fund, properly managed, would enable this Government and successive Governments to give due and effective emphasis and attention to those environmental issues currently on the agenda and any future ones as they arise, in a fair and equitable manner.

In closing, as far as public-good conservation measures are concerned, it is pointed out that the issue of private benefit and public-good benefit is often not clear cut. Even when a conservation measure is deemed to have only private benefits, there is often a public benefit associated therewith – e.g. laser-levelling of irrigation bays means more efficient use of water, therefore less water use and increased production. This means that the farmer saves on water costs and receives a higher return from crops and therefore laser-levelling is deemed to be for private benefit. There is, however, a flow on effect for the public-good in that less water used means more water available for other uses, including environmental, and higher production means more input to the local community in terms of produce, jobs and wealth. This is not to suggest that laser-levelling should be flagged as a public-good conservation measure, but just to highlight that there is generally a public-good benefit flow-on effect from the implementation of conservation or environmental measures.

If there is a need to contact me with regard to any of the issues in this submission, please call me on (02) 68539033 at work, or on (02) 68574261 at home.

Yours sincerely,

Rei Beumer