

**SUBMISSION TO HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES INQUIRY INTO THE  
IMPACT OF CONSERVATION CONTROLS IMPOSED ON LANDHOLDERS  
- FORWARDED BY THE FRIENDS OF NEWLAND HEAD CONSERVATION  
PARK**

**BRIEF SUMMARY**

- ❖ Background to submission
- ❖ Cost Sharing
- ❖ Environmental volunteer viewpoint
- ❖ Relationship to conserved public land

## **Background to submission**

Due to timing difficulty it was not possible for the Friends of Newland Head Conservation Park (FNHCP) to provide a submission to the Standing Committee within the period advertised for initial submissions.

Our Project Officer, Ron Taylor, made a personal submission and was present at the recent hearing in Adelaide. During that hearing he was invited to make a submission based on his group representation. Some core members of the group have now met and discussed the Terms of Reference and this submission has been endorsed by the FNHCP Executive Committee.

The FNHCP is an incorporated body under the umbrella of the Friends of Park Inc. which is administered by the Community Liaison Department of the Department of Environment and Heritage, SA Government.

FNHCP is not a myopic group confined to its Conservation Park boundaries. It has representatives on regional bodies such as a Department of Environment and Heritage Consultative Committee and regional steering committees as well as regularly commenting on planning amendments which might influence natural resource management generally hence our interest in accepting the second opportunity to comment. The group consists of 44 members contributing 2,800 hours of volunteer work annually to environmental management

## **Cost Sharing**

It is accepted that past land use practices have resulted in a damaged natural environment. There is a cost of enhancing, maintaining or rehabilitating our natural resources. Remedial actions are essential for the health and wellbeing of the land and for the general public.

It is accepted that the cost of those benefits must be shouldered by all.

There is concern that it may not be clear in the proposal whether some of the rehabilitation costs might be due to negligence by the landholder and were recently deliberate and clearly preventable if current new practices had been followed. These acts might include –

1. Overzealous land clearing in some states where it is still permitted.
2. Drainage of wetlands and wasteful use of water including excessive damming causing problems to downstream owners who might claim legitimately that their problems were not avoidable by them.
3. Outmoded tilling practices causing topsoil loss or erosion.

4. Any ancestral farming practices still in use such as overstocking or yearly stubble burns which have been superseded by more environmentally friendly land management practices due to well documented research.

The public should not be expected to shoulder the costs of such preventable damage. This is clearly the land user's responsibility. On the other hand sympathy must be felt for those landholders who have 'in good faith' followed the direction of the Government of the day and cleared and managed their land in accordance with the policy and practices as recommended. It is these disadvantaged landholders who we believe fall into the area of recompense for remedial action which may be required. The Terms of Reference do not delineate a need to address the element of possible negligence in assessing eligibility.

### **Cost sharing bias towards polluters**

FNHCP considered that certain products particularly packaging and more particularly plastic bags might attract a consumption levy of some nominal value to create a disincentive for their increased usage and proliferation in our litter stream. It was seen as having to occur at consumer level to ensure that there was an awareness and education as to why it was being levied and that the levy be applied to remedial work on degraded farm land.

Some consideration should be given to taxing or levying those sectors of the manufacturing or mining industries which are still major polluters of our air, land and our water courses. It seems an opportune time to raise such disincentives and create some equity and balance in the system. Otherwise it may be viewed that the levy is being applied to repair preventable damage which these industries expect to cause, thereby giving continued pollution by the major polluters the appearance of legitimacy.

It was thought that a consumption levy in general would be more equitable in preference to any flat rate per taxpayer.

In general it was felt that there would need to be considerable thought given to how the levy should be collected and whether the public will need to be educated as to its necessity beforehand.

### **Environmental Volunteer Viewpoint**

All FNHCP members must pay a membership fee to assist in administration costs of the group. The fee is nominal and consequently those core members of the executive in fact shoulder the majority of the costs. Administering the needs of a group of 44 people – providing 2 monthly newsletters and ensuring that 2,800 hours of volunteer work are carried out efficiently and in accordance with local and regional objectives using best practice is very costly to those involved in co-ordinating that work.

The result is that key volunteers are spending from \$10.00 to \$200.00 per week to achieve those goals. It is felt that levying these people might have a negative reaction on them and yet it is these people who are providing the groundwork and ensuring that many of the publicly owned conservation areas holding significant biodiversity are maintained or improved. They may in fact represent the whole of the community environmental focus in some local areas.

It is suggested that volunteers contributing legitimately (just like private landowners) should be allowed some exemption in the form of tax deductions for proven expenditure. We are sure that both State and Federal Governments are unaware of the nature of some of the work being undertaken by dedicated volunteers. These people do not seek acclaim for their work but work daily 7 days a week at virtually no cost to the public endeavouring to bridge the gap between the rate of degradation and a desired environmental standard.

### **Relationship to conserved public land**

FNHCP believes that public conservation areas should also be addressed within this inquiry. Public conservation areas, coastal reserves, Local Council reserves, etc. are largely being maintained in partnership with various community groups today. The onus of the upkeep from a community point of view is falling upon only a small percentage of the community. It is agreed that it is often with the overwhelming silent support of that community but the time and cost is being shouldered by a small group.

However these public areas hold biodiversity, scenic amenity, tourism, gene pool and significance values which surpass agricultural land values from a conservation viewpoint. FNHCP is concerned that there is no indication that funding for these areas will continue and in parallel to the agricultural perspective placed on recompense in this inquiry.

We are concerned that unless the inquiry addresses the continuing need to support the costs of administering the volunteer groups by providing materials to maintain conservation then there may be a switch and shifting of money from the public purse into providing increased value and investment for the private (landholders) purse to the detriment of funding for public conservation areas. We urge the standing committee to broaden the scope of the inquiry to incorporate adequate funding for both private and public environmental rehabilitation.

Reassurances of continued funding of public conservation in the current nature of Natural Heritage Trust Funds is urgently needed.