

The following submission has been written by Stephanie Porter on behalf of her father in law, John Brodie, who is a sheep farmer at Longwood in North East Victoria and Captain of the Longwood fire brigade.

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**SUBMISSION FOR THE 'INQUIRY INTO THE  
IMPACT OF CONSERVATION CONTROLS  
IMPOSED ON LANDHOLDERS'.**

**1. The impact of conservation measures imposed by governments on landholders and farmers.**

**a. Impracticality of proposed fencing off of reserves, for example; creek frontage, for 'critter' habitats**

i. In many cases creek frontage constitutes a significant portion of land. The cost of fencing off such areas would be extreme in both dollars and time required to construct the fence.

ii. By requiring farmers to fence off their creek frontage, especially in cases when this constitutes a significant portion of the land owned, this would result in a reduction of the number of stock which can be run on the land, ultimately resulting in a loss of income.

iii. In order to follow the line of a creek, either the fence would have to be extremely long, with many corners, or excessive land would be taken.

iv. In cases where the creek runs through the centre of a property, fencing the creek off would restrict access for the farmer within his own land.

v. By fencing off the creek frontage, livestock are unable to access water. To overcome this, dams must be constructed, resulting in further cost and land loss.

vi. The fenced off areas soon become overgrown, often with weeds such as blackberries, making the issue of weed control all the harder for the landowner.

vii. Once overgrown, the fenced off area also becomes a habitat for foxes and feral cats which are detrimental not only to native wildlife, but also the livestock of the farmer. Especially when this habitat is through the middle of the land giving the foxes an area to shelter with easy access to lambs.

### **Suggestion.**

There are quite a number of unused roads in the area which are already fenced off and, in most cases, not used for farming so they would not directly affect any landholders in relation to points i. to iv. as mentioned above. Concerning points vi. and vii., the unused roads generally run along the perimeter of farmland rather than through the land, reducing the access that the weeds and vermin would have to each farmer's land.

### **b. Responsibility for weed control on adjoining roadsides.**

i. This used to be the responsibility of the government. People were employed to spray along the roadsides, but now this is an added responsibility for farmers.

ii. When grain and livestock were transported by train, the railway easement was maintained by the railways to prevent the introduction and spread of weeds and bugs. Now that transportation is mainly by road, the landowners who happen to have land adjoining the main routes have extra work to contain the spread of these weeds.

### **c. Compulsory membership of Landcare or extra rates.**

i. There is a question on the fairness of this system.

ii. Many farmers were working on erosion, weed and habitat issues anyway.

iii. There is an issue with the way that the Landcare people tend to treat the farmers. While they are well meaning, the impression comes across that the Landcare people know everything and the farmers do not know what they are talking about. It is important that an equal partnership is formed between the two groups, as each group has a different range of knowledge and expertise which, when used in a cooperative fashion, can compliment that of the other group.

iv. With the large number of part time and volunteer Landcare members and administrators, it has to be asked whether they really do have the necessary knowledge and appreciation of both farming and conservation issues, or if they are just people that have 'jumped on the Landcare bandwagon'.

### **Suggestion.**

Rather than basically threatening farmers with penalties for not joining a Landcare group, liaise with the farming community and negotiate possible management plans with them. Employ permanent officers to undertake this work so that a positive working relationship can be formed. It is felt that by taking this approach rather than the current approach, there is less chance of the farmers taking offence or feeling like they are being forced into something, and more chance that they will eventually co-operate by choice. For the cases where farmers do not make an effort to address the conservation issues in question, there needs to be a severe consequence. This is because one irresponsible farmer can make all of the hard work by his neighbours basically useless – especially in the case of weed control.

### **c. Significant Roadside Areas.**

i. Some of these areas were used as firebreaks for the protection of land and commuters along major roads, eg: Hume Freeway. Now they are not able to plough the same section as has been ploughed for many years, allowing plant growth to become significant. There is now the risk of fire to the land and an increased chance of wildlife being hit by vehicles as they are populating areas so close to heavy traffic areas.

ii. In some areas, the burning off of roadside areas has been prevented as certain wildflowers have been found in that area. In the case of Violet Town – Earlston Road, near Euroa in North-East Victoria, this has happened. Anecdotal evidence in the area suggests that after two years of not burning, there have been less wildflowers noticeable. This is on top of the increased fuel load if a fire were to go through, making it more difficult to protect farmland and livestock.

iii. By leaving long grass along roadsides, there is a fire risk from cars if they happen to pull over in that area with the extreme heat of catalytic converters and exhaust systems on the under carriage, not to mention discarded cigarette butts.

## **Suggestion.**

Refers back to the use of unused roads as reserves as discussed in Point a. Also clearing a 2 – 3 metre strip from the bitumen outwards to serve as a fire break for land against potential fires caused by motorists.

### **3. How to establish the private and public good components of conservation.**

Rather than employing part-time administrative people to delegate tasks to already hard-pressed farmers, revert back to the way of the old Lands Department. That is, employ permanent workers, or officers, with actual knowledge of the issues to tackle problems, liaise with farmers and actually undertake the majority of the work, especially on public land.

### **4. How to equitably share the costs associated with conservation among all members of the community.**

By making conservation control a completely government run department, the cost can be covered by all members of the community as it is an issue which affects everyone. Members of the community can be affected directly, as in the actual farmers who rely on the land for a living, or indirectly, for instance, shopkeepers in rural areas and people in metropolitan areas being able to access quality Australian made products.