

NORTH CONARGO LAND MANAGEMENT GROUP

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19 May 2000

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

Dear Committee Secretary

*RE: INQUIRY INTO THE IMPACT OF CONSERVATION CONTROLS
IMPOSED ON LANDHOLDERS*

The North Conargo Land Management Group (NCLMG) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission.

Our Group, which consists of 22 landholders covering an area in the Western Riverina of NSW of 188,000 hectares. Extensive dryland grazing is the predominant activity of the area. In recent years deep bores have been developed which support irrigated crops and pasture. The developed area amounts to 3% of the 188,000 hectares. Further increases in the developed area are restricted due to limited water resources.

Landholders and Managers of this region have, for in excess of 100 years, continued to manage their properties in such a way that it has allowed the preservation of native vegetation. This in turn has allowed many endangered species including in particular the Plains Wanderer to co-exist in this region.

A quote from the forebears of a family in the NCLMG area that have been on the land for 130 years are still prospering is; "if you look after this country, it will look after you." It is an adage that has evolved with this region and we would like to think our Group continues with this sentiment to the region's advantage.

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The Group considers there are 4 main issues that are worthy of your consideration. They are regional issues that have State and Federal implications.

CONSERVATION CONTROLS ISSUE

- 1. Lack of practical BALANCE between on-going improvement and development of freehold land and the management of native vegetation.*
- 2. Lack of real awareness of the FINANCIAL and practical limitations placed on landowners and managers to comply realistically with NSW Government policy.*
- 3. Lack of broad community and land owner/manager CONSULTATION to enhance trust and ensure feasible long-term outcomes that have true community benefits.*
- 4. Poor definition of DUTY OF CARE. Landholders continue to carry the financial responsibility for the protection of certain species including in particular the Plains Wanderer and its habitat.*

SPECIFIC ISSUES

There have been 4 recent examples of the current system of voluntary property agreements having a significant impact.

One landholder has agreed to enter a property agreement, there were 2 choices available. The first choice required accepting caveats on the title, the second choice was not to enter the property agreement and thereby realise a significant devaluation of the asset. The cost is 20% of the property now tied into a property agreement for the broader community benefit.

Another landholder has not entered into a property agreement because of the ownership structure. The DLWC have been inflexible in their approach to negotiating the agreement which has resulted in significant opportunity loss, a real cost in excess of \$50,000, due to the protracted negotiations.

A third landholder was unable to develop their selected site due to the Plains Wanderer and had to incur a cost of \$60,000 to locate in a different area.

A fourth landholder is unable to resolve his development proposal, which is now 3 years in the negotiation process, as there is no adequate structure in place to deal with the proposal.

The impact on landholders is real and the costs are high. It is becoming a significant burden for landholders to carry. It is clearly a benefit to the broader community and the cost benefit to landholders is questionable.

The land management practices of the region which promoted the survival of the Plains Wanderer, and therefore the enhancement of native vegetation, has now come back to bite the landholder, becoming a significant financial burden, a straight cost to their business and a threat to their long term viability.

These examples are related to irrigation development. The issues of development applications and management practices are more important for the future management of the extensive dryland pastoral country.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to minimise or eliminate any negative impact of conservation controls on landowners the following recommendations should be seriously considered and implemented.

- 1. Promote the application of commercial principles and practices by Federal and State Governments in addressing the needs of the environment with socio-economic impact studies undertaken.*
- 2. There needs to be a balanced coexistence of sound farming practices with effective environmental management. This may be by way of voluntary property management plans. This would allow the removal of compulsory requirements of registered on-title property agreements.*
- 3. Development of voluntary environmental management systems. Governments continue to support industry based production quality assurance schemes with excellent results, eg Clip Care, Flock Care, Cattle Care. The extension of the voluntary industry initiated and controlled schemes are linked to environmental outcomes. This initiative needs recognition and support by Governments.*
- 4. The process of consultation with all stakeholders must improve.*
- 5. If outcomes of the consultation inhibit landholders' management plans the broader community must contribute to the cost.*

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6. *In NSW the terms “public conservation service” and “duty of care” must be clearly defined. To ensure that “private conservation services” are financially rewarded when duty of care finishes and broader community support takes over.*
7. *There is a lack of public conservation reserves and parks to assist in the preservation of native vegetation, and in particular the Plains Wanderer, in the Riverina region that needs immediate action, at both State and Federal level.*
8. *We strongly encourage the Committee to impress upon the NSW Government that the adoption of this proposed plan would enhance positive environmental and socio economic outcomes.*
9. *The Commonwealth should consider an environmental health levy paid by all taxpayers to assist in funding issues such as those we have listed above.*

CONCLUSION

The issues raised in this submission relate to NSW State Legislation in respect of Native Vegetation and Threatened Species. They are having a significant impact on the cost of local landholders. We see it as important for these issues to be understood at the Commonwealth level and for the Commonwealth to become involved in playing its part in assisting communities to deal with the implication of these legislations and one way is to contribute to the purchase of public reserves in the Riverina region, funded by environmental levies.

Yours faithfully
NCLM GROUP

BRUCE SIMPSON
Chairman

DONALD BULL
Committee Member