

18th May 2000

2nd May 2000

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

Dear Sir

Inquiry into Public Good Conservation

Tallaganda Shire Council wishes your Standing Committee to consider the following issues in undertaking the above Inquiry:-

Full and Adequate Compensation of Landholders

The Inquiry should be cognisant of the need for full and adequate compensation for any conditions imposed on landholders for conservation measures imposed by both State and Federal Governments. The compensation should recognise:-

- the loss of production attributable to conservation measures, with a recognition of the compounded effect of such loss of production over the long term;
- the additional cost to landholders of maintaining fencing, mitigating against any increased fire risk and controlling any increase in noxious weeds or feral animals as a result of conservation measures adopted;
- all capital cost involved by landholders in complying with conservation measures;
- any loss of land value that may be attributable to the conservation measures applied to the individual property or property in the locality; and
- the fair market value of any land confiscated for conservation purposes.

Regulatory Control of Local Government

Tallaganda Shire Council is becoming increasingly concerned at the level of regulatory control being imposed on local citizens and local government by Government agencies, particularly State Government agencies. Within the last two months, Council has been actively involved in ensuring the local community was fully aware of a range of natural resource management issues with potential to impact significantly on their present standard of living and livelihood. These matters include:-

- access and land tenure threatened by the Southern Regional Forest Agreement (RFA);
- requirements to fence streams and improve on-site wastewater and waste disposal proposed in the *“Audit of the Hydrological Catchments managed by Sydney Catchment Authority”*,
- issues associated with embargoes and restrictions on water use associated with the State Government’s recently released White Paper on Water Reform; and
- the large number of conservation and land management issues outlined in the Discussion Paper prepared by the National Natural Resource Management Task Force entitled *‘Managing Natural Resources in Rural Australia for a Sustainable Future’*.

It is also interesting to note the lack of community consultation and local government involvement that occurred in each instance.

Southern Regional Forest Agreement – though local government in the region was represented on the Southern Regional Forest Forum by one representative, he made no contact with Tallaganda Shire Council. That representative was not re-elected at the September 1999 ordinary local government elections though he continued to serve as a local government ‘representative’. The options being considered as part of the RFA process and the resultant serious effect on landholders within Tallaganda Shire came as a complete surprise, with very limited time in which to respond.

Audit of the Sydney Catchment – Council was not consulted regarding the audit and there was no local community and/or elected local government representative on the Audit Study Team or Independent Reference Panel associated with the audit.

White Paper for Water Reform – this was released with only a two to three weeks’ period for public consultation. The period for comments was subsequently increased by two weeks. The White Paper proposes representation by all relevant State Government agencies on Water Management Committees but only one local government representative regardless of whether the Committee’s sphere of influence extends over one or ten local government areas.

Discussion Paper entitled ‘Managing Natural Resources in Rural Australia for a Sustainable Future’ - this discussion paper was released in December 2000, but only made available to local government in mid March 2000, with a closing date of 31 March 2000 for comment. This was subsequently extended to 21 April 2000. There were no elected local government representatives on the Steering Committee or Reference Group consulted during the course of producing the discussion paper and no State-based peak local government bodies were represented among the list of Commonwealth, State and Territory government agencies consulted.

No wonder local government and the community are highly cynical about the community consultation and ‘grass roots’ driven processes expounded by both Federal and State Governments, particularly in relation to natural resource management issues.

Council trusts the Standing Committee will give serious consideration to these issues in preparing its report.

Yours faithfully

Alan Stewart
GENERAL MANAGER