

## Inquiry into 'Public Good' Conservation

### Summary of this submission:

- The National Trust of South Australia is the holder/manager of significant areas of land in Nature Reserves.
- The conservation work carried out in these National Trust reserves is funded by government grants, but greatly facilitated by the work of volunteers. If the number of volunteers continues to fall, then the benefits of work already done will be lost.
- It should be acknowledged that advocacy and education costs are legitimate parts of a campaign to conserve natural values.
- In grant applications, when the landholder receives no 'private' benefit from the conservation work, the required input of funds 'in kind' should be set at less than equal to the funds provided by the grantee.
- Bodies such as the National Trust, which carry out conservation work entirely for the public benefit should be given special recognition when 'cost-sharing' is calculated.

### Introduction:

This submission is from me as a private individual. I am a member of the State Council of the National Trust of South Australia, and Chair of its Nature Conservation Advisory Committee. I have also had a long association with conservation work in National Parks, and in the Nature reserves managed by the National Trust of South Australia.

### Costs to landholders:

The National Trust of South Australia currently has a membership base in the vicinity of 5000. It is a body responsible for the management of 30 nature reserves in South Australia. Some of these reserves are on Crown Land, and the Trust manages them for the South Australian State Government. It also manages a number of buildings, and for these activities receives some financial assistance annually.

As a 'landholder', the Trust takes very seriously its responsibility for conservation in its nature reserves. It does not itself have the funds to carry out all the conservation work, which it deems desirable. The work that is done is funded by grants from various government sources, such as the NHT, and much of the work is actually performed by volunteers, both members of the Trust and interested members of the public.

Many other conservation bodies, such as National Parks SA, Bushcare, Landcare and the Australian Trust for Conservation Volunteers, also rely on the input of volunteers. There is now competition between us for the services of a limited number of people willing and able to assist in conservation work. If the National Trust of South Australia is not able to maintain its volunteer register, then more of the conservation work will have to be done by contractors, with the inevitable result that either the amount of work will decrease, or the funds expended will greatly increase.

As the Trust does not have the capacity to increase the funds expended on Nature Conservation, it seems inevitable that the amount of work will decrease. This would be a tragedy, as not only will the rate of improvement decrease, but some of the improvements already made will be lost, as weeds reinvade, feral animals re-establish, and pollution returns to areas reclaimed during past years.

Costs to the public and the need for education

The National Trust of South Australia has made a policy decision that all its reserves, whether Crown Land or land owned by the Trust, should be open to the public at all possible times. This sometimes leads to difficult situations where public use and conservation are in conflict. An example is when an area previously used for holiday camping must be closed for a time to allow regeneration of vegetation; or where suburban dog-owners are no longer welcome to exercise their pets in an area of natural vegetation.

The Trust has accepted a role in advocacy, promoting conservation of Natural values. However, the costs of a local education campaign, in areas where this type of conflict occurs, is beyond the budget of the Trust.

I recommend that: It should be acknowledged that advocacy and education costs are legitimate parts of a campaign to conserve natural values.

Financial assistance from government grants

Many of the funding sources which provide grants to assist conservation works include the requirement that the applicant should provide an equal amount of funds 'in kind'. In the case of the National Trust, these funds are raised by putting a dollar value on the volunteer hours provided by its unpaid workers.

As mentioned above, the National Trust faces serious problems in maintaining its core of volunteers, and in the future, may not be able to find volunteers to provide this 'in kind' contribution. Setting the required input at less than an equal figure will allow the Trust to continue its valuable work.

The problem of finding volunteers is widespread in voluntary groups, and is a problem that must be faced. How can managers foster a climate where volunteers are encouraged, enthused and rewarded? Or where can managers find a replacement pool of knowledgeable, enthusiastic workers?

I recommend that: Where the landholder receives no 'private' benefit from the conservation work (see below), the required input of funds 'in kind' should be set at less than equal to the funds provided by the grantee.

Sharing costs when there is no 'private benefit'

Some landholders may derive direct financial benefits from the work they undertake, through improved productivity of their land. Bodies such as the National Trust derive no such 'private' benefits. All the benefits are directed to the 'public', some of whom, of course, are members of the National Trust.

If the Government finds ways to share the costs of conservation in a way that distinguishes between 'private' and 'public' benefits, this should be recognised.

I recommend that : bodies such as the National Trust, which carry out conservation work entirely for the public benefit be given special recognition when 'cost-sharing' is calculated.

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