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THE ADVISORY BOARD OF AGRICULTURE

Governing body of The Agricultural Bureau of SA

18 May 2000

Mr. Ian Dundas
The Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee
on Environment and Heritage
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr. Dundas,

Inquiry into the Impact of Conservation Controls Imposed on Landholders

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage is to be congratulated for holding this Inquiry.

All too often landholders are expected to bear the costs and responsibilities of conservation measures for the benefit of the whole community. Where the benefits are much wider than just to the landholders, then the costs and responsibilities need to be shared much more fairly.

Example

As an example, one way the community could share responsibility for preserving bio-diversity would be to assist land managers who have fenced natural bushland areas within their properties.

This could be done by providing compensation for costs associated with retaining the land in its natural state - such as paying Council rates, waiving the Emergency Services Levy, paying for weed control and servicing financial costs. Even for small areas, these costs can be substantial as illustrated in the following example:

A 12 ha block of native bushland situated near Saddleworth in the Lower North of South Australia contains at least 52 native plant species (recorded during a recent survey). This represents a high plant diversity for E. Odonata woodland, given the size of the block and the level of clearance in the district. It is one of only a few, relatively undisturbed areas of natural bush being preserved in the area.

The valuation for rating purposes is \$44 000 or \$3 700 per ha. Current Council rates are \$270 annually. An Emergency Services Levy of \$61-05 has been added. If the valuation is correct (it is actually way above current cleared land values), then to preserve this area for community benefit, the owner is paying at least \$3 000 a year.

The area was placed under a Heritage Agreement 12 months ago but Council rates in 1999 were still paid by the owner and it has not escaped the Emergency Services Levy.

There are many more examples where it is the landholders that pay for the benefits of conservation for the whole community. There needs to be more equitable cost-sharing arrangements made to accompany conservation controls.

Yours sincerely,

(Rodney Bell)
CHAIRMAN