



13th August 2008

The Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Rural & Regional Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Email: rrat.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Sir / Madam,

Re: Inquiry into natural resource management

The Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association is the peak representative body for farmers in Tasmania, representing over 3000 members across a wide section of agricultural pursuits including meat, wool, dairy and vegetable production.

Since the mid 1980's the Tasmanian farming community has been heavily involved and supportive of the wide spectrum of NRM initiatives. Some of Tasmania's farmers can now proudly boast a 20 year involvement in the Landcare movement.

Whilst the funding of these various programmes is essential for their success, one factor that is often underestimated in the programmes ability to be successful, is the committed goodwill of the farming community. It is also worth noting that the farming community throughout Australia is responsible for the management of 62% of Australia's land mass. This is a responsibility which the majority of farmers take very seriously and many farmers work towards achieving viable environmental outcomes with little or no support from Government. It is the goodwill of the farming community which has the capacity to deliver environmental outcomes well in excess of any outcomes that could be achieved purely by regulation. It is important therefore that the goodwill of the farming community, that has been cultivated through the journey of Landcare and other programs, is sustained by an appropriate funding model.

Farming by its very nature is a long term activity and therefore needs Government programs that equally have longevity. This has been one glaring weakness in many of the NRM programmes where many have been subject to "burst" funding coinciding with Federal electoral cycles. Whilst it would not be appropriate to never review such arrangements, the uncertainty created by such variable funding arrangements reduces the effectiveness and the long term sustainability of a range of environmental outcomes. A far better arrangement would be for NRM funding to be a permanent budget line item, excluded from the electoral cycle, program name changes and politician partisanship.

The recent switch to regionalisation is a positive approach, which has the capacity to deliver efficient and effective administrative outcomes. Naturally the organisations that administer NRM funding need to have a capable workforce which is able to engage with farmers and land managers in the long term. The ability to maintain capable networks is crucial to achieve realistic outcomes in the NRM field. Within the farming and broader community, there has always been a criticism that funding should be more targeted to on-ground works. However from a governance and deliverability point of view, there is a requirement for a capable administrative structure to support NRM programs.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a written submission / comment on this issue.

Kind regards

Roger Swain
President