

Cheltenham Station

Phone / Fax

14 July 2003

Dear Mr Campbell

In light of the forthcoming *Inquiry Into the Impacts of Native Vegetation and Biodiversity Regulations*, I request that you peruse the document “**ROAD MAP FOR SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION OUTCOMES AND ENHANCED LANDSCAPE VALUES**” (May 2003) – A Formal Submission Commenting on the Desert Uplands (Northern) Draft Regional Vegetation Management Plan (RVMP.)

Alternatively, attached is the document 's Executive Summary, or one may consider using the URL address <http://www.users.bigpond.com/cheltenham.station/> for viewing the unfolded Road Map

Yours faithfully

Jeff Bucknell

***AgForce Representative and Freehold Landowner
Desert Uplands (Northern) Planning Area RMVC (Regional Vegetation Management
Committee)***

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Landholders on the Regional Vegetation Management Planning Committee, and members of both AgForce and the Towerhill Torrens Creek Catchment Landcare Group have been engaged in the discussion of vegetation management issues for more than a decade, and are aware of the need to be proactive in reconciling community environmental objectives, and to take responsibility for managing their land while being guided by the principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development. Consequently, the unfolded ROAD MAP is responsible for having brought the Regional Vegetation Management debate to the table in the Northern Desert Uplands Planning Area.

Purpose

The Road Map provides additional information to, and elaborates on, the decision rationale and outcomes of the Draft RVMP. It further addresses the key sustainability issues, through the application of local knowledge and skills to the performance requirements and acceptable solutions, and includes a management guide for timber communities and a comprehensive economic case study.

Aims

Landholders, and indeed all stakeholders alike, are determined to have planning certainty for long-term profitability. The document outlines innovative local best practices to maintain and enhance biodiversity and the sustainable economic development of landholders' properties on a regional scale.

Significant Considerations

Nature conservation data from existing sources has been properly considered. The retention rates for all Regional Ecosystems is 50% or greater, with all *Endangered* and *Of Concern* Regional Ecosystems retained (including those on the threshold of a status change). Key catchment values will be protected. The accorded retention rates, combined with responsible sub-catchment protection in all cases of above 70% across the planning area, negate many landscape issues including salinity hazard and risk. ROAD MAP considers all available science and takes into account the nature and causes of dryland salinity, particularly the critical role of the intake and discharge areas.

Areas of High Conservation Value and Lands Vulnerable to Degradation are already highly preserved in ROAD MAP's recommendations. It is extraneous to move them to the extra level of protection through formal declarations, as the structure of the plan naturally accommodates this and already has made appropriate recommendations.

The National Park Estate has been expanded in the last ten years. An extensive stock route and road system (with recommended buffers along all major roads) criss-crosses this area and contributes to regional retention, wildlife and riverine corridors. These combine with the adjacent natural corridor of the Alice Tableland Subregion to form a significant area strongly reflecting all regional ecosystems. The Flinders component boasts considerable acreage that is National Parks (approx. 3.5%) with Stock Routes, Roads and Reserves etc. a further (approx.) 5.5%.

Overall cattle numbers in the two local government authorities within the planning area demonstrate the significance of the general area in relation to production values, representing 10% of the total Queensland cattle herd, with a herd asset value of almost \$500,000,000.

While development in northern Queensland may not appear as dramatic as in southern areas, it is, however, relative and the opportunity has never been more crucial when compared with current undeveloped land values.

Less productive Regional Ecosystems within the planning area have an internal rate of return on investment of approx 32% after development.

The Flinders Shire portion of the planning area makes up 85% of the freehold tenure in the entire planning area. (Approx. 250,000ha or 17% of the Flinders Shire portion is freehold.)

It is not possible to reach equitable conclusions for landholders until the contentious issue of compensation is resolved. Where the landholder is required to forego a potentially reasonable development opportunity, for a situation that is deemed to be for the community's benefit rather than the landholder's, financial assistance must be provided to the affected landholder.

Conclusions

It is important to note the scale of clearing that has occurred already in this region, and to put into perspective future clearing potential:

Previously, there was no overall clearing cap. The current clearing in the Northern Desert Uplands is less than 7 %. With the proposed capped retention area, 81.5% would remain - even if the planning area were cleared to the maximum percentage as outlined in the Draft RVMP. Over and above this cap, there is a 10% increase of retention in the current code recommendations.

It is highly unlikely that clearing ever will occur to this extent and, in any case, the large retention means the integrity of the planning area will be left intact.

3,000,000 ha of remnant vegetation in the Desert Uplands (Northern) will be preserved. This is far in excess of the amount originally proposed when the Vegetation Management Act legislation was drafted.

Although difficult to document the underlying anecdotal evidence and supporting figures, it remains indisputable that well-planned vegetation management, with soundly managed post-clearing that encompasses holistic drought and risk assessment, including the impacts of climate change on vegetation, results in sustainable beef production systems and improved enterprise viability.

The positive long-term sustainability and viability of development in the Desert Uplands (Northern) Planning Area has been demonstrated previously through the responsible actions of many landholders in our region. Stakeholders' preparedness to accept overall clearing caps, staged permitting, rigorous monitoring and necessary performance codes, within the economic constraints, highlights our community's passion for, and commitment to, Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD.)

Preventing further tree clearing in southern Australia will have very little impact on the social and economic fabric of those rural communities. On the other hand, preventing the development of small percentages in our northern region (further development of 12 % of the Desert Uplands [Northern]) will impact severely on rural communities in northern Queensland.

The Northern RVMP process has highlighted the need to maintain autonomy at a local bio-regional level, in planning for vegetation management. If this autonomy is compromised by state or federal level assessment, severe inequity will result for vast areas of northern Queensland, which will be profoundly penalised because of other regions' past vegetation management practices.