



West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority

File: NVP
Our Ref: TR18703

24 July 2003

Native Vegetation Inquiry
Productivity Commission
LB2 Collins St
East Melbourne 8003

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Inquiry into the Impacts of Native Vegetation and Biodiversity Regulations

I refer to your letter received at our office on the 27th of June relating to the above Inquiry. The West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority has reviewed the Issues Paper and Offers the following comment.

The Victorian Government released "Victoria's Native Vegetation Management – A Framework for Action" in 2002. The Framework contains the State and reflects the National Policy for Victoria. Regional Native Vegetation Plans have been developed to translate the objectives of the State Framework to the regions. By Ministerial request, each Catchment Management Authority in Victoria has been asked to develop regional plans by June 2003.

With relation to policy and legislation, the Victorian Planning Provisions require Local Government to give regard to the approved Regional Vegetation Plans when amending planning schemes and reviewing Municipal Strategic Statements. When considering planning permit applications, Local Government "must consider the approved Regional Vegetation Plans" as stated in Clause 15.09-2 of the State Planning Policy framework (under the Planning and Environment Act, 1987).

The West Gippsland Native Vegetation Plan is currently in draft form awaiting Ministerial endorsement. The West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority views the plan as functioning in the following ways. To:

- Act as a reference document for the conservation status of vegetation communities
- Provide strategic directions for protecting and enhancing remnants and establishing regional targets for vegetation types
- Develop regional priorities and targets for protection, enhancement and restoration of vegetation
- Provide regional guidelines for responsible referral authorities in determining permit applications to remove, destroy or lop native vegetation
- Identify gaps in knowledge and best management practices for native vegetation retention, regeneration and planting across the catchment; and
- Identify appropriate opportunities for interaction with local landscape scale processes that provide additional detail for key natural resource management issues eg. Biodiversity Action Plans.

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Only 14% of native vegetation in the West Gippsland Region remains on private land. Of this 14%, much of it occurs as small isolated patches and is of poor quality. With so little vegetation left, the need for a regional document was identified by both the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority and the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE).

The West Gippsland Native Vegetation Plan had undergone an extensive community consultation process and its three year development has been overseen by a Consultative Committee consisting of a broad range of stakeholders.

The regional plans are referral documents to the State Native Vegetation Framework which contains new policy that places restrictions on harvesting native vegetation on freehold land. It is not the intent of the plan to encourage clearing of native vegetation on private land. Rather the plan provides information on incentives and assistance available for native vegetation protection and enhancement. For example, the plan identifies and supports the BushTender program which has recently been trialled in Gippsland. This is a tender/auction system to encourage the setting aside and management of native vegetation. The plan also recognises the importance of monitoring native vegetation removal. The permit tracking monitoring system, being developed by DPI/DSE is identified as the mechanism to be used by local government.

Under the Planning and Environment Act (1987), Shires “must consider” approved regional vegetation plans. Currently in West Gippsland, Shires and Departments are beginning to understand and adopt Victorian Native Vegetation Policy however implementation, resourcing and understanding are still in early stages. It is the view of the Catchment Management Authority that new Victorian Native Vegetation Policy is a positive move however, for implementation there will need to be a strong commitment from Local Government Authorities.

If you have any questions relating to this submission, please contact me on (03) 51757800

Yours sincerely,

Terri Rodaughan
Biodiversity, Conservation and Bushcare Officer
West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority