



**NORTHERN
MIDLANDS
COUNCIL**

Submission

**Impacts of Native Vegetation
and Biodiversity Regulations -
Productivity Commission Draft Report**

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Northern Midlands Council express their appreciation to the Australian Government for being invited to be part of the consultation process associated with the Draft Report.

Mayor Kim Polley will present the Northern Midlands Council submission at the Public Hearing to be held at the Corus Hotel Hobart on Friday 13 February 2004.

2. PROFILE OF NORTHERN MIDLANDS MUNICIPAL AREA

The Northern Midlands Council was created on 2 April 1993 from the merger of the former municipalities of Longford, Evandale, Campbell Town and Ross together with the towns of Rossarden, Avoca and Royal George from the Fingal municipality and covers an area of 5,130 square kilometres.

The Northern Midlands is one of the largest and most diverse municipalities in Tasmania. It ranges from mountainous country on its eastern and western boundaries to extensive grazing lands renowned for fine wool production.

The area consists of rich agricultural river flats of the Esk, Lake and Macquarie Rivers with many historic towns and villages.

Agriculture is the largest employer in the region with a gross production value of \$59.7M in 1995-96 when the last agricultural census of the area occurred. The total area of holding was 373,567 hectares.

The population of the Northern Midlands was estimated to be 11,990 by the ABS figures. This was 2.53% of the estimated State population that totalled 472,725.



3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Under the terms of the Bilateral Agreement signed by the Federal and State Governments, Councils will be required to administer the controls protecting non-forest vegetation

In relation to this matter, issues were raised at public meetings held at locations throughout the State (Oatlands, Longford and Hamilton) with specific concerns relating to:

- a) Agriculture no longer a permitted use in all rural zones
- b) Council's obligations for implementing controls
- c) No guarantee of funding after three years

It was noted that the Department of Primary Industries, Water & Environment indicated that high priority areas involved 40,000 hectares in the municipal areas of the Northern Midlands, Southern Midlands, Central Highlands, Flinders Island and King Island.

During discussions held with these Councils, it was identified that there were practical deficiencies in trying to protect threatened non-forest communities in the relevant planning schemes and furthermore Councils advocated that rural landowners should not have the sole burden of protecting species unless appropriate compensation was paid.

4. PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION DRAFT REPORT

At the Council Meeting held on the 19 January 2004, the Productivity Commission Draft Report was discussed and in particular the section described as the overview and draft recommendation and findings were circulated and it was mentioned that:

"The draft report recommendations/findings appear to address several of the concerns raised by Council and in particular it recognises the need for landowners to be compensated where they are found to be adversely impacted by the protection of native vegetation on their land".

It was noted that **Draft Finding 6.1** highlighted that restrictions on farming practices could occur due to regulations controlling vegetation clearance and protecting biodiversity conservation and the following points highlighted in the report were acknowledged by Council as significant issues:

- Limiting the opportunity to expand or reconfigure the area of productive land
- Restricting the ability to maintain the amount of productive land on a property
- Inhibiting the introduction of new technologies
- Restricting or preventing changes in land use; and
- Inhibiting a range of normal farm practices such as thinning vegetation, rotating (fallowing) parts of the property, clearing around fence lines and managing pests, animals and weeds

In relation to **Draft Recommendation 8** that refers to conservation demands by the wider community should be “bought” from landowners where intervention deemed necessary and cost efficient, it was strongly agreed that mechanisms such as voluntary agreements, options or compensation regulations are ideal measures to be considered.

With reference to Chapter 6, Impacts on Landowners, Other Industries and Regional Communities--**Draft Finding 5.4**, reference was made to uncertainty amongst landowners and use of blanket rules regarding clearing of regrowth has resulted in landowners clearing regrowth more frequently than otherwise.

An example put forward was the illegal removal of a wedge tail eagle nest to another environment by a landowner thus ensuring that the productivity of the land is not affected.

5. SUMMARY

The Productivity Commission Draft Report provides clear and concise information about the impacts of native vegetation clearance and biodiversity conservation.

The draft recommendations are endorsed and with due consideration by the State and Commonwealth Government, the negative impacts on affected landowners would be reduced.