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Productivity Commission  
Native Vegetation Inquiry

**Proposal for a National Framework for the Management of Land**

It is proposed that the Productivity Commission initiate and oversee the development of a national framework for the management of land.

This would include,

- Minimum expectations for the management of land. These to be developed locally and applied to each and every hectare.
- A network of regulated areas, some formal, some informal, which would preserve or restore a comprehensive and continuing representation of all ecosystems.
- Establish a catalogue of co-existing rights and entitlements for land owners and managers, e.g. entitlements to information and support.
- Facilitate the mutual development, sharing and preservation of knowledge among affected parties.

We currently have a successful system of National Parks and reserves. But standards of management need to apply to land not so covered, irrespective of whether the land is being managed for forestry, agriculture or whatever.

This proposed framework would affect all land and emphasise and focus on minimal and self-evident rights and obligations. In so doing it would emphasise mutual benefits and shared responsibilities, rather than alienation, restriction, compensation and legal disputes.

It is hardly an unreasonable imposition to be required to minimize soil erosion; to avoid polluting streams; or to desist from the elimination of pre-existing ecosystems, and the eradication of their species.

Experience has shown that land owners often start with a low level of knowledge, but generally become enthusiastic supporters and leaders in the development of good management practice.

**General objectives for land regulation**

These should include:

- Conservation of the mass and fertility of soils;
- That the general nature and extent of our ecosystems is maintained;
- That the species of animals which hop, scurry, rustle and swim, should continue to do so;
- That the birds still sing.

A recent article supplied by Greening Australia<sup>1</sup> reported on a bird survey on the North West Coast of Tasmania. It stated that, “*Birds are indicators of the ecological health of farms, catchments and landscapes*”. However, it noted that “*much habitat in the region has been cleared leaving only small isolated pockets of remnant vegetation to accommodate birds.*”

However, it was certainly not pessimistic and predicted that “*it would not take long for the revegetation works to start bringing back the birds*”.

### **Minimum expectations for the management of all land**

An owner may have the right to cultivate land and grow a crop, but he or she does not have the right to cart away truckloads of topsoil and dump it into the ocean. Nor should the right exist to cultivate a crop in such a way that the predictable forces of wind and rain will have the same effect.

The right may exist to alter or remove vegetation. But there should be no right to cause widespread or significant ecosystem damage out of ignorance, avarice or bastardry.

Thus we need to develop a set of guidelines to establish a minimum standard of conduct for the management of all land.

### **Parameters for the proposed ‘Regulated Areas’**

- Proportion for regulation – For the purpose of discussion an overall minimum of 10% is suggested.
- Scale of regulation – This determines whether 10% of every property should be formally regulated; or 10 ha out of each and every 100 ha; or 100 ha out of each and every 1000 ha, etc.
- Fragmentation – This specifies what minimum size of regulation is appropriate. The Greening Australia article suggests the protection or restoration to a minimum of 2 ha, and preferably 5 to 10 ha in size.
- Continuity / Pattern – The Greening Australia article suggests connecting patches of native vegetation with habitat strips 50 m wide, or creating habitat clumps as ‘stepping stones’.
- Regionalization – It is important to recognize and manage regional variations and requirements. To this extent Tasmania has seven IBRA regions established as part of the RFA process.
- Priority – Some areas and tasks should have a higher priority than others. For instance, the protection of the banks streams with the management of existing vegetation.
- Allowable use – This will vary considerably and will range from no restriction at all, to total protection. One area may require fencing from wandering stock; another may require periodic burning. For others the priority might be to remove

a particular feral animal, or remove individuals of potentially invasive weed species.

### **General entitlements for landowners**

It is important to recognise the needs of landowners and managers. People who invest in land and land based enterprises need to be able to do so in good faith, and with the support of Government for those functions best done on a State or National scale.

For example,

- Land tenure and availability should be known and unambiguous, with legal status readily determined, e.g. The web based LIST in Tasmania.
- A statement of land capability, without guarantee, should be available for purposes of planning and evaluation.
- Areas should be mapped and photographed with a useful range of formats and scales, and these available at a reasonable cost.
- There should be a system for diagnosis and reporting of known problems, e.g. plausible pests, susceptibility to flooding.
- Research should be available in support of available land use. A useful model in this context is the user funded Forest and Wood Products Research and Development Corporation.
- Clear policy protocols for land use.

### **Parameters for the establishment of formal reserves**

The RFA process in Tasmania, and no doubt elsewhere, and the associated Forest Practices Code have resulted in a process which recognises the needs of a network of formal reserves.

This system should apply on all land.

- Assess the existing categories of biota, e.g. classes of forest
- Estimate the amount of those classes which existed pre 1780.
- Establish a target area for reservation by IBRA region.
- Establish the amount already reserved.
- Establish the amount not reserved but potentially available.
- Establish a target area for further reservation.
- Assess priorities for various classes.
- Consider the status of species of biota within classes, etc.
- Plan for reservation in terms of fragmentation, continuity etc, as above.

## **Conclusion**

This submission is to extend the existing good work being carried out already by numerous organisations, and based on the work of thousands of people over many years.

There is no claim to particular originality in a lot of the ideas in this submission, except to say that every hectare is important. Every species, every clump of trees and every spadeful of soil needs to be thought about in an informed way.

Beyond that we need to support people who own and invest in land, and land based enterprises. We do this by giving them a clear policy and legal framework, the information they need, and support in project development and problem solving.

We should include in decision making and policy formulation all those parties who will be affected by the outcomes.

We should also recognise the large number of people and organisations who stand ready to support schemes for revegetation by the provision of labour, materials, advice etc.

Geoff Dean

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<sup>1</sup> Jaffray, S. (2003) *Bringing back the birds*, TAS-REGIONS: Incorporating Agriculture Tasmania”, pp. 18-19