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N I L L U M B I K
THEGREEN WEDGE SHIRE

18 August 2003

Native Vegetation Inquiry
Productivity Commission
LB2, Collins Street East
Melbourne VIC 8003

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Impacts of Native Vegetation and Biodiversity Regulations

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the review of the Impacts of Native Vegetation and Biodiversity Regulations. Several key issues have been addressed below; in particular impacts of these regulations towards flow on effects to regional communities. Also taken into consideration are the roles the various levels of government play in implanting Native Vegetation and Biodiversity regulations. Whilst it has been recognised that the Federal Government provides policy framework and some funding for Native Vegetation and Biodiversity protection it should be highlighted that it is incumbent upon State and Local Government to implement the 'on ground works' associated with these regulations.

2.1 Impacts on landholders and regional communities

Negative impacts on landholders

- Costs to landholders vary considerably in managing native vegetation. The potential costs depend upon property size, vegetation condition and community. Associated monetary costs may include that of purchasing and/or installing vegetation protection fencing and undertaking weed control. However, landowners may recoup some of these costs through a variety of grant schemes available from various organisations. Nillumbik Shire Council aims to assist land owners that seek to manage and conserve native vegetation on private land. Council offers several incentive programs for this purpose. *Please see attached brochure 'Land Management Incentive Program'*. However many landowners are not aware of the range of incentive programs (other than Nillumbik Shire Council grants) available to them as large land owners. In addition costs available through many of these grant programs do not reflect the true cost to the landowner in undertaking such works.

2.

- Many landholders can adapt to limit the adverse impacts and reduce the costs of regulations by working together. Landcare groups are an excellent example of how communities can work together to achieve desirable environmental outcomes.
- The regulatory regimes more often affect those properties which have been identified as those containing higher quality remnant indigenous flora and/or that adjoin areas of significant flora such as parks, reserves and or waterways.

Recommendation: Federal and State Government provide further financial support to Local Government to deliver Natural Resource Management.

Positive impacts on landholders

- Several benefits have emerged for landowners from the regulatory regimes including the opportunity to secure funding to undertake vegetation protection and enhancement works, greater public awareness as to the land management benefits of protecting remnant native vegetation including the prevention of erosion and salinity problems.
- The failure to protect native vegetation on a particular property, or a group of properties and/or the local region often results in groups of property owners banding together to overcome this problem - often through Landcare groups. It can however, also be discouraging for some landowners if others in the area do not attempt to manage their properties in an environmentally responsible manner. Nillumbik Shire Council's leads by example to the community through its *Environment Strategy - Actions for a Sustainable Future 2001*, which aims to protect and enhance biodiversity and to protect and avoid or reduce threatening processes.

Recommendation: State Government (Department of Sustainability and Environment & Department of Primary Industries) provides further 'onground' support to local government to ensure that non complying landowners protect native vegetation on their properties by enforcing existing legislation.

Administrative cost for landholders

- Many landholders are still unaware as to their obligations as land managers as stated in the regulatory regimes. It is often as a result of approaching Council in relation to other matters that landholders are informed of their obligations.

Recommendation: State Government (DSE & DPI) to undertake further community education in relation to landholder obligations and provide further support to Local Governments currently fulfilling this role.

3.

Government measures to mitigate negative impacts

- Several funding opportunities are available to larger land owners from the State Government, however, the amount of practical onground advice and/or assistance to adopt farming practices to meet the requirements of the regimes under review is very minimal to landholders in the Shire of Nillumbik. This assistance is instead, largely provided by Local Government and Landcare.

Recommendation: State Government (DSE, DPI & CMA) to provide further onground resources throughout the region to assist the work currently being undertaken by Local Government and Landcare groups.

Impacts on non-landholders and regional communities

- The regulations under review assist in protecting the natural landscape of the region for both residents and the greater community of Melbourne. The Shire of Nillumbik forms an essential part of the Melbourne metropolitan Green Wedge and the community places a high value on Nillumbik's environment. This 'Green Wedge' status also assists in attracting a large number of visitors to the region.

2.2 Efficiency and effectiveness of environmental regimes

- Other factors/practices that are likely to affect the achievement of environmental objectives include vermin control - rabbits are an enormous problem on private land throughout the Shire. Whilst research as to their impact upon native vegetation has not been extensively documented within the Shire it is thought to be high. Environmental weeds invading bushland and fire management are also issues of importance in the Shire. Both these issues affect the environmental objectives of the regulatory regimes under review.

Perverse environmental outcomes

- Monitoring and enforcement of the regulatory regimes is limited due to inadequate resources in the region. The State Government offers limited 'on ground' support to matters of this nature.

Recommendation: Further assistance (in particular resources) is made available to Local Government by the State Government (DSE & DPI) in undertaking monitoring and enforcement.

Cost effectiveness

- Resource costs to Local Government are incurred in implementing these regimes. This is generally in the form of officer hours and funding for land management assistance programs.

Recommendation: Further funding assistance be made available to Local Government to continue its valuable role in implementing these regimes.

4.

2.4 Transparency and community consultation

Implementation of regulatory regimes

A clearly identified source of information (that explains landholder obligations) is not currently freely available to landholders. A large number of landholders in the region do not appear to have an in-depth knowledge as to the significance of native vegetation and/or the benefits of conserving biodiversity on private land.

Recommendation: State Government (DSE & DPI) in conjunction with Local Government to produce landholder information kit that clearly explains land holder obligations under the regimes under review.

2.6 Options to reduce adverse impacts of environmental regimes

- The regimes under review have been introduced by the government to protect areas of environmental significance. These regimes should continue to be strengthened to ensure that native vegetation protection and enhancement remains a priority.
- Landholders have a duty to manage their land in a responsible manner ensuring that native vegetation and biodiversity are conserved. They currently have access to a range of funding programs to assist with vegetation management. Further education for landholders is needed throughout the region as to the environmental benefits of conserving and enhancing native vegetation. Currently Nillumbik Shire Council offers monetary incentives to landholders in the form of an annual rate rebate for any land that is placed under a conservation covenant.

Recommendation: Further community education is required to promote the benefits of native vegetation protection and sustainable agricultural practices thus ensuring that native vegetation is not seen as a barrier or an invaluable resource to landowners.

The comments and recommendations listed above are a means to address issues that are presently preventing the desired environmental outcomes of the regulatory regimes from being met within the region.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Abbey
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