

## Supplementary Comments on Impacts of Native Vegetation and Biodiversity Regulations.

The following comments and attachments are based on discussions and observations emanating from the public hearings held in Melbourne in August, 2003. My experience and therefore conclusions are limited to Victoria.

### Visions and Outcomes.

Conflict in Victoria appears to be arising from the different visions and outcomes expected from native vegetation and biodiversity regulations. This stems back to values and ideology of all parties involved and the interpretation of Ecologically Sustainable Development in Victoria.

The Productivity Commission observed in its inquiry into the uptake of ESD by government departments a few years ago that many departments believed that ESD was only relevant to natural resources and ecology and failed to comprehend the social and economic components of the concept. The interpretation of ESD has continued to narrow in Victoria, rather than expand to incorporate the social and economic factors.

The two simplified models of ESD below have helped me understand the two very different perspectives of where the state is heading

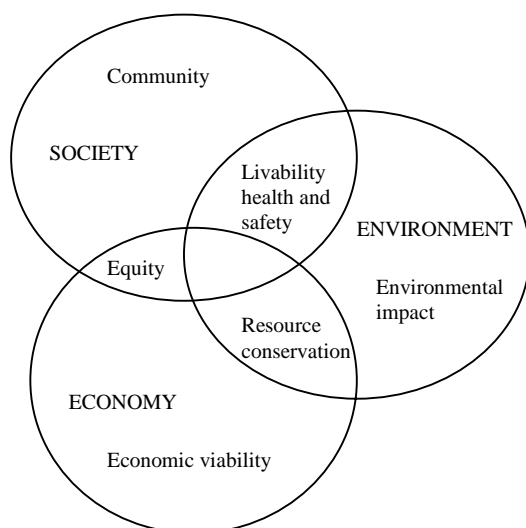


FIGURE 10.1 The dominant view of sustainable development

### MODEL A

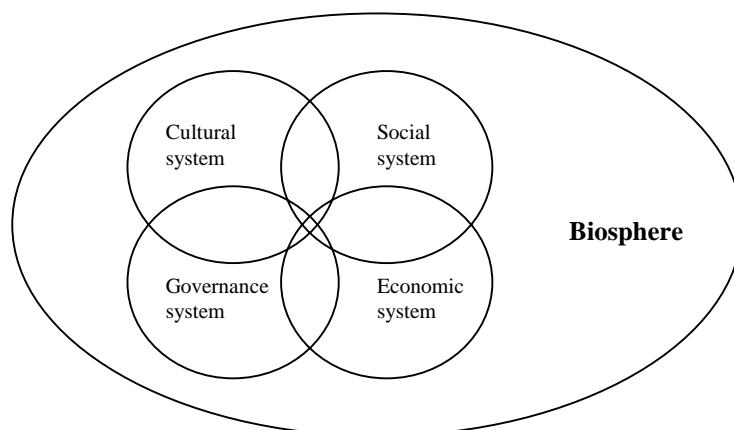


FIGURE 10.2 An alternative view of sustainable development

### MODEL B

*Eichler, M, 1999 in Sustainability and the Social Sciences edited by Becker and Jahn, Zed Books, NY.*

Farmers generally adhere to Model A, accepting the interconnection between ecology, society and economics and try to find a balance between the three. The dominant environment groups adhere to the second interpretation, Model B, that places the environment as the most important component with social, economic, governance, cultural spheres contained within and limited by the environment. While the first model allows for the integration of humans and nature, the second model entails humans taking second place to nature. Adherence to the second model can result in simplistic solutions such as removing humans from large tracts of natural areas and justifies stretching the law in pursuit of higher ideals as the law is less important than the environment. The Victorian government claims to be adhering to the first model, but appears to be using the

native vegetation and biodiversity regulations to bring acceptance of the second model as the norm. Understanding the ideological base of the regulators is fundamental when considering regulatory tools as this influences the interpretation and implementation of the regulations.

Public discussion on the ideological base and outcomes required in Victoria in regards to natural areas, perceived as most of rural Victoria, has been very poor. Thus the confusion of so many farmers as to why they are being viewed as environmental vandals when they believe they have been heading towards ESD and the zealous enforcement by some regulators beyond current laws but in line with deep ecology theology.

Excluding the word 'ecological' from the term 'sustainable development' as in the rest of the world would assist the public in understanding that ecology is only one part of the trilogy and the social and economic spheres are just as important.

### **The Gaia Vision.**

The Wilderness Society, under the guidance of Dr. Soule from USA, is currently implementing a program in Australia called Wildlands. Naturelinks is its brand name in South Australia, WildCountry is the title of the program for the eastern states. This clearly sets out the long-term goal of the major environmental groups. Unfortunately few people are aware of either the implementation of the program or the long-term goal. See Attachment B for further explanation about the WildCountry program. While the government appears to view the main environment groups as spokespeople on behalf of local communities, many have become global and are interlinked, well-resourced, professional organisations. They even have career paths and could be seen as an industry in itself (as tourism is called an industry) competing with other industries for the resource base for their members preferred uses. I understand the WildCountry maps for Australia may have already been produced although they are not available to the public.

So the outcome desired by the environment groups is very different to the one that farmers believe they are meant to be achieving. Details of the WildCountry project in Victoria can be found at <http://www.wilderness.org.au/projects/WildCountry/wc.html>

### **What needs to be done?**

Open discussion of the long-term vision so rural Victorians are aware of the program, initiated by a major conference/event in Melbourne where the different ideologies can be discussed, debated and documented out in the public arena. Suggested speakers could include Bjorn Lomborg, Peter Garrett, Wildlands USA rep such as Dr. Soule, and representatives from Environment Victoria and Environment Australia, the Victorian WildCountry co-ordinator from TWS, VFF, a primary producer, BUG (Bush Users Group) academics and a Victorian government representative. Until all the different visions are on the table, we cannot evaluate them and proceed forward. We appear to currently have the subversive implementation of WildCountry without the wider public's knowledge and without a social or economic impact analysis of such a program in our State. It is not fair to primary producers and I believe it is the underlying factor behind the shifting goalposts. Establishing where the long-term goalposts are will alleviate much of the confusion in rural districts. If the wider community accept the Wildlands project in Victoria, then primary producers can plan accordingly, knowing that they have been classified as a sunset industry by the new generation of planners. If the project is not accepted, then regulatory tools to prevent harassment of primary producers in the path

of proposed WildCountry wilderness corridors or buffer areas can be introduced. This issue should be widely publicised before progressing any further.

### **Structures**

It doesn't appear to be necessary to create new government institutions to achieve the long-term vision for the state. They just need tuning. There is already provision for compensation for 'special areas' to be protected on private property under the FFG Act.

Evaluation of all CMA programs should include feedback from local communities to ensure connectivity between the CMA and the grassroots. Boards of CMA's should hold regular public meetings outlining the programs and priorities so they build relationships with landholders and are accountable to the communities they represent. There are no current avenues for communication between community representatives on CMA Boards and landholders.

### **Education**

Rural landholders need assistance with fully understanding their legal position with environmental regulations as policies are changing so rapidly. The VFF has already done a great deal in this area with the publication of a simplified legal handbook for rural landholders and legal advice for members. The need for legal advice, even when performing basic farming functions, is becoming over-whelming. The environment groups have an Environmental Defenders Office (EDO) who receive substantial funding from government. The equivalent amount of funding should be given to a Rural Defenders Office (RDO), to ensure there is an equitable balance in advice and legal representation. Accessibility to the law is fundamental in achieving equitable outcomes.

There is also a need for an education campaign to counter-balance the current campaign by environment groups that portray rural residents as ignorant, environmental vandals and farming as bad. Assistance with funding for such a campaign would restore some balance. Alternatively if less government grants were given to environment groups for lobbying purposes, then time and money would be saved all round. Presently environment groups have paid professionals to run campaigns and write submissions while primary producers counter lobby and write submissions in their 'spare time'.

Environment groups should also be made aware that vilification based on rurality or occupation is as unacceptable as vilification on the basis of race, sexual preference or gender and the law could be changed accordingly to reinforce this concept.

### **VNPA & Environment Victoria**

Environment groups have a very important role to play in our society and should be leading the way towards ESD. However, I believe it is going beyond the role of such groups as Environment Victoria and the VNPA to lobby for a regulatory outcome that imposes their value system based on Gaia onto the wider population and private property without a social and economic assessment. I have enclosed the rural zone campaign currently being conducted by VNPA for your interest. Also documents from Environment Victoria. Environment Victoria is often perceived by the public to be a government organisation due to the similarity in name to the federal government's Environment Australia. West Wimmera Shire gets a special mention on EVs website. It was surprising that Environment Victoria and VNPA did not submit submissions to this inquiry as they are very active on the issue. I have enclosed the EV submission into

native vegetation regulations 2000 which states all land clearing should to be stopped by 2004, supported by gradual tightening of regulations in the interim.

Pearson and Andrews (2000) [http://www.globalchange.umich.edu/webprojects/w00\\_maasai.htm](http://www.globalchange.umich.edu/webprojects/w00_maasai.htm) suggest the association between conservation projects and the top-down approach reinforces existing conflicts and divisions between local communities and government. Lobbying for conservation was often instigated by 'outsiders' without close ties or linkages with the local community to be affected. This resulted in the conservation lobbyist's targeting policy-makers directly to make the policy change and then for the government to impose the policy changes on the local community. Direct lobbying of state governments by environment groups without the knowledge of the local communities affected appear to be eroding trust in government in many regions in Victoria. This is leading to a decline in social capital in rural communities. For example, in the Otway Region, a new tourist project, promoted as a replacement for primary production, has felt the need to hire security guards in a district that has only ever had one policeman overseeing three local towns.

### **Global Trade**

There are serious trade issues involved with environment groups receiving substantial overseas funding from unknown sources and then using that funding to denigrate Australian industries and products on the net and overseas. Campaigns are currently running against the Australian Forestry Industry Standard and the EcoSelect brand of timber. <http://www.wildemess.org.au/econeglect/home.html> This is a disincentive to gain accreditation under the new forestry industry standard. 'Third party accreditation' is overseen by environment groups who clearly have a pecuniary interest in seeing their accreditation schemes become popular and they are biased. The formation of the green political party has also changed the perception of green accreditation and marketing systems. It is a disincentive to engage for those businesses that do not wish to align with a particular political party. The most difficult aspect of exporting is coping with our own country's environmentalists undermining the overseas market. There is no simple system in place that requires environment groups to substantiate their claims.

### **Rollover Funds**

The fact that we are considered to be unsuitable landowners by the managers of the rollover funds highlights that this is an elitist scheme. We are considered untrustworthy to care for high quality native vegetation as our land management system is different to parks management systems.

### **Conclusion**

It appears that pressure from environment groups on state and local government's are driving the prescriptive native vegetation regulations and excessive 'use of the big stick'. A well-organised sector of the community is ideologically opposed to many types of primary production and believe that farming is destroying Australia's environment. Native vegetation and biodiversity regulations are the simplest tool to use to oppose development of any type.