



FORESTS & FOREST INDUSTRY COUNCIL OF TASMANIA

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Submission to:

Native Vegetation Inquiry
Productivity Commission
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From:

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The Tasmanian Forests and Forest Industry Council (FFIC) is formed from associations with an interest in forest and land use issues. Its Executive consists of members representing the Forest Industries Association, the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association, the Tasmanian Country Sawmillers Federation, the CFMEU Forestry and Furnishing Division, the Tasmanian Logging Association, Forestry Tasmania, Private Forests Tasmania, and the Department of Infrastructure Energy and Resources and it numbers the Local Government Association of Tasmania, Unions Tasmania, the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Timber Communities Australia, the Furnishing Industry Association of Australia, the Tasmanian Beekeepers' Association, the Department of Economic Development, the Tourism Council of Australia (Tasmania), and the Tasmanian Recreational Land Users' Federation amongst its General Council.

The FFIC was created in 1989, in part in response to the decisions made following the Helsham Inquiry, and partly as a condition of the Labor-Green Accord to form a majority State Government. It went on to create the Forests and Forest Industry Strategy of 1990 and played a significant role in the annual forest debates about export quotas for woodchips, Recommended Areas for Protection, the formation of the Public Land Use Commission, and the development of the Regional Forest Agreement. It continues today as the peak body

providing external advice to governments on land use issues covering forestry and conservation, and industry development.

The FFIC of Tasmania makes this submission to inform the Productivity Commission of the measures taken in Tasmania to ensure that land use practices are managed sustainably to ensure the protection of native vegetation and biodiversity and to request the opportunity to present further explanatory material at a public hearing.

Complementarity in biodiversity protection

While it is recognised that the Inquiry is focused on potential negative impacts on farming practices, productivity, property values and returns for affected landowners and is thus primarily concerned with private land, regulatory regimes designed to protect Australia's native vegetation and biodiversity can only function successfully if public conservation is complemented by private. Ideally, the public reserve system must deliver major outcomes with private cooperation to secure conservation outcomes where values do not exist on public land.

Unless most of the required protection can occur on public land, private landowners will bear the brunt of measures to ensure protection of native vegetation. The level of public land reservation for biodiversity protection must form a base for assessment of private land impacts by the Productivity Commission.

In making this point, I draw the Commission's attention to the large provision for biodiversity protection through reservation in Tasmania.

The FFIC believes that States are bearing the impact for regulations applied through the States at Commonwealth insistence. The Regional Forest Agreement process is a case in point. Tasmania has created vast reserves (40% of the State and 40% of forests) to meet or exceed Commonwealth guidelines on biodiversity conservation and wilderness protection yet the Commonwealth provides inadequate assistance for the proper management of these reserves. Operations are under-funded and there is no financial assistance committed to the management of these parks to ensure that the values for which they were reserved will persist in the future.

As has been so recently and tellingly illustrated, the capacity of park management to protect reserves from wildfire is almost non-existent.

In Tasmania, funds for the upkeep of infrastructure where popular areas of parks are overused are so short as to threaten closure or rationing of access to the attractions.

If underfunding means that we start to lose values for which reserves were created, pressure will transfer to protection of these values on private land.

Impacts on landowners

The FFIC believes that there are impacts [Para 3(a) of the Terms of Reference] on property values and returns and on landholders' investment patterns. The FFIC recognises the debate will continue and also recognises that landowners in participating in that debate have never shirked their duty in terms of commitment to community values. When community requests step past the level that can be privately sustained the community must recognise that there is an effect on farm viability and regional economies.

Flexibility

The Tasmanian approach to protecting biodiversity and native vegetation from clearing is a flexible amalgam involving the Forest Practices Code (in place since 1985) used to regulate harvesting to ensure environmental protection; the Permanent Forest Estate Policy which covers public land and through consultative mechanisms ensures protection for identified rare, endangered, or vulnerable ecosystems on private land; and a private land Comprehensive, Adequate, and Representative (CAR) reserve program for private land. These mechanisms functioning together sensibly and flexibly ensure the maintenance of native forest, especially threatened communities, while presenting a means for securing particularly important forest communities in reserve programs and providing for the reasonable aspirations of the community and industry for economic development.

In relation to the Tasmanian Forest Practices Code, it is noted that the Productivity Commission has recognised the Act governing forestry practices has been amended recently to accommodate non-commercial land clearing.

Stakeholder understanding of regimes

The Commission requests input on the level of understanding of the relevant legislative and regulatory regimes among stakeholders. In our view, there appears to be an inability to grasp the fact that Tasmania has the highest level of public land reservation in the world amongst those who oppose the sustainable use of native vegetation. An educational program for the general public giving the lie to the often repeated but unfounded claims of some political groups who will never be appeased is warranted so that the public can put these erroneous claims in perspective.

Government measures mitigating negative impacts

The Federal Government, through its funding of the Private Forest CAR Reserve Program, has taken a positive step to diminish the cost to landowners of management of native vegetation for biodiversity conservation. This system arose from the RFA and has resulted in covenants or purchase of at least a quarter of the 100,000ha target set in the RFA. Movement by the Federal Government on Capital Gains Tax and social security issues has helped progress in this area.

The flexibility inherent in the eight principles guiding this program (Attachment 8 of the Tasmanian RFA, p91) has resulted in a consultative and inclusive process being conducted in a cost effective manner until recent times. The Resource Planning and Development

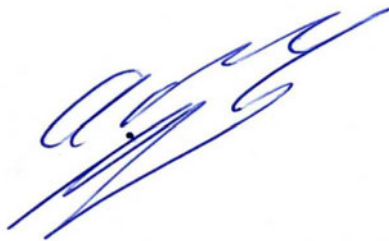
Commission (RPDC) in its Review of the Implementation of the RFA notes that there will be an ongoing, and currently unfunded, need for further conservation program on private land (p21). Landowner interests represented on the FFIC have reported that there has been a recent impetus to secure outcomes at the cheapest rather than most adequate level.

Adequacy of assessments of economic and social impacts

The FFIC brings to your attention the recommendation of the RPDC Review (p91) that information on the economic and social outcomes and impact of further land reservation in the RFA is largely unknown as at this point development work on Indicators has not been sufficient to provide reliable estimators.

The Forests and Forest Industry Council is pleased to discuss any of these points further and will provide any information that the Productivity Commission feels we can offer to assist it in its deliberations.

Yours sincerely



Allen Dagger
Chairman

