

## PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION

### Inquiry into the Impacts of Native Vegetation & Biodiversity Regulations

From  
Greening Australia (Tasmania)

#### **Context - Background on the organisation making the submission.**

Greening Australia is a key non-government, not-for profit organisation that is in the business of supplying conservation services on private land.

Greening Australia (Tasmania) operates statewide and is a part of the national Federation of Greening Australia. We have been operating for 21 years, since 1982.

As an organisation we have a broad membership and stakeholder base that includes an extensive number of private landowners. Our involvement with this sector is very relevant to this inquiry and we consider that we have a good understanding of private landowners needs and the drivers that should be used to support conservation on private land.

Greening Australia (Tasmania) provides practical on-ground services to landowners including natural resource planning and management advice, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. Our organisation has an annual turnover in the order of \$3-4million per annum and our funds come from both private and government contracts and tenders. We are fully self-funded and not supported by government or by other levies or taxes. Over the last six years we have been extensively involved in delivering a range of programs to support conservation on private land.

As the CEO of Greening Australia (Tasmania), I am writing this submission on behalf of our organisation. I am also currently a member of the Tasmanian Natural Resource Management Council and was a member of the Committee that developed Tasmania's Nature Conservation Strategy.

#### **Key issues**

This submission largely addresses the aspects of the Issues Paper that relate to the section: "*Additional approaches to conserving native vegetation and / or biodiversity.*"

Over the last few years there has been increasing emphasis on conservation on private land. This is a significant and important change as it moves ownership and to a certain extent responsibility away from the Crown. Additionally it may be a more cost effective means of attaining conservation outcomes than the traditional system of Crown managed reserves.

It is my view that in order to achieve effective nature conservation outcomes on private land **a mix** of regulation and incentives measures are required. Regulation on its own will not achieve long-term, constructive environmental outcomes. Voluntary conservation on private land provides by far the best long-term outcome. The reasons for this are that it ensures landowner ownership and personal knowledge of the assets being protected.

With this in mind, it is essential that all options or approaches to conserving biodiversity on private land in addition to regulation are explored and supported.

However, it is also important to recognise that whilst this might be a cost effective way of gaining conservation outcomes, it is not cost free and appropriate resources need to be applied to achieve good results.

Ways need to be found to attach value to private conservation resources to assist private landowners in defraying the costs of retaining the nature conservation assets and foregoing any opportunity costs.

Full compensation is neither realistic (we know the funds are not available) nor is it justifiable. Two principles should apply to achieve a balanced outcome.

### **1. Duty of care**

Landowners have both individually and collectively already spent some of the capital in terms of the physical and ecological values of their land. Evidence of this is the emerging salinity, lost biodiversity, erosion and soil loss, and pollution of land and water.

However this land degradation is not all their fault as much has been done under the auspices of government policy, for example through soldier settlements and perverse incentives such as concessions for land clearing. So the Government and broader community must bear some responsibility. Additionally, where rehabilitation is undertaken, both the landowner and the public will benefit.

### **2. Public purse for public benefit**

The entire community should help bear the cost of public good activities. This can be achieved through;

- Compensation payments
- Stewardship payments
- Other market based instruments such as certification programs
- Provision of management assistance and advice
- Provision of financial incentives such as for fencing and provision of on-ground works

It is also essential to recognise that a system of private landowners and private reserves needs:

#### ***Support***

Landowners will not have the resources or expertise to undertake nature conservation activities without good management advice and some on-ground assistance. It should be recognised that NGO's such as Greening Australia are well placed to play a key role in providing this on-going extension support. Being at arms length from Government and not a regulating body helps us build our relationships with landholders and means we can get the job done as efficiently as possible. We already have a well-established relationship with the rural sector and are highly regarded and trusted.

#### ***Diversity***

To be successful a system of private reserves needs to have a range of options for landowners to link into. These should range from low entry such as Land for Wildlife, to protection of ecological assets for an extended period of time i.e. 10 years progressing up to full covenanting. There must be good networking and information support to the various programs that need to be tailored to suit the participating landowners.

#### ***Continuity***

To date most of the private reserve programs have had a short-term focus. If conservation on private land is to be effective there needs to be a long-term approach to the programs. Implicit in this long-term approach is that systems and processes need to ensure that there is continuity of support staff and resources. A stop-start approach does not work and in fact can take us backwards.

#### ***A professional approach***

Conservation works on private land, or where ever for that matter, need to be treated with the same professional approach as commercial forestry and agriculture. There needs to be detailed planning, risk management, skilled professionals, maintenance and support, and on-going monitoring and review.

It should not be expected that these voluntary programs can function on a shoestring or without adequate expertise and commitment from the Government. At the same time the expectations of the private landowners should be high. If they are prepared to be involved in these programs they must understand that the programs are serious with real responsibilities and commitments.

### ***Resourcing***

Any private reserve programs need to be planned and funded until they can be confidently considered to be fully established and self-sustaining. If we are really serious about this then long-term, continuous resources need to be found to support the effort.

### **Case Study**

Non-government organisations like Greening Australia are extremely well placed to provide the support / extension role required for effective nature conservation programs on private land. For example - Over the last six years Greening Australia (Tasmania) has delivered a number of Natural Heritage Trust funded projects that have brought about considerable conservation outcomes on private land. In one project, 30,000 hectares were protected during a four-year period. Projects have involved the provision of incentive payments for activities such as fencing, weed management and technical management advice. In return landowners have committed to protecting their native bush voluntarily for at least 10 years. The full cost to tax payers for this program has been \$100 dollars per hectare protected with over 400 landowners participating voluntarily. There is a significant willingness by landowners to participate in this type of voluntary conservation project provided the “ingredients” are right. Paper work and red tape need to be minimised, and the agent delivering the service needs to be trusted by the landowner. Similar projects have been successfully delivered by Greening Australia in many parts of Australia.

However there is a catch. Currently government funded projects always seem to be of a stop start nature, severely lacking in continuity. The Natural Heritage Trust 1 (NHT 1) provided funding on a one-year allocation basis over the last five years. This was problematic enough. However, in the transition period from NHT1 to NHT2, due to bureaucratic processes, Tasmania has been without any funds for on-ground works for almost twelve months. Practical, on-ground organisations such as Greening Australia have been left high and dry. We no longer have the resources to coopt new volunteers or to continue to support those already signed up.

Government needs to ensure a long-term, continuous framework is established to ensure conservation on private land is a real and effective option in contributing to Australia’s long-term environmental health.

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