

**Australian Government Productivity Commission Draft Report -  
Impacts of Native Vegetation & Biodiversity Regulations**  
Submission by the Victorian Catchment Management Council (VCMC)

The VCMC is the State Government's peak advisory body on catchment management. Catchment management involves the sustainable use and management of land and water resources at a catchment level.

The VCMC was established in 1997 by the Victorian Government under the *CaLP Act*. The Council is uniquely placed, independent of government agencies, regional catchment authorities and non-government organisations, to take a long term view and influence change in working towards its vision for catchment management -

*Victoria will have healthy rivers flowing through ecologically sustainable and productive catchments.*

Council takes a statewide view on land and water issues and priorities related to catchment management. It facilitates integrated and coordinated catchment management through Victoria's catchment management framework.

The VCMC works closely with DSE, DPI and EPA. Council is also working to strengthen strategic catchment management planning by increasing collaboration with Local Government.

The VCMC also encourages cooperation of bodies such as Non-Government Organisations involved in the management of land and water resources.

Council has a role in providing a five year report on Catchment Condition for the State and produced *'the Health of Our Catchments: A Victorian Report Card'* in 2002.

The Victorian Catchment Management Council is pleased to submit the following comments on the Australian Government Productivity Commission Draft Report - Impacts of Native Vegetation & Biodiversity Regulations.

The Council would like to congratulate the Australian Government Productivity Commission on producing the Draft Report - Impacts of Native Vegetation & Biodiversity Regulations. The report is an important source of reference material, which has stimulated much public discussion on the impact of regulation on native vegetation and biodiversity.

The Council notes that the Draft report commented unfavourably regarding the impact of regulations on development proposals. In Victoria, native vegetation regulations do not place a prohibition on clearing and in the majority of occasions, where statutory planning referrals involving native vegetation clearing are made to Departments, approval is given (most commonly with conditions).

The Council noted with interest the recognition of ecosystem services in the draft report and believe that the inquiry could have further investigated the benefits of ecosystem services resulting from native vegetation, versus the costs we currently face and future generations will face due to ongoing environmental degradation.

The Council's 2002 *'the Health of Our Catchments: A Victorian Report Card'* develops 'a Vision for Victoria' and outlines the importance of knowledge and the need for an integrated natural resources management strategy for Victoria. At a regional level Catchment Management Authorities (CMA's) had also arrived at a similar position, identifying the need for integrated landscape-scale change that delivers multiple outcomes on the ground. The approach is now known as 'Land Stewardship'.

The Council's aspiration is for all Victorians to embrace a land stewardship ethic as part of their everyday life and decision making. Many landholders, either individually or as part of Landcare, invest their time and resources in land stewardship.

The Victorian Catchment Management Council in collaboration with the Catchment and Water Services Division of the Department of Sustainability and Environment has been involved in a Land Stewardship project. Funded by the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality, the project investigated a range of mechanisms that could help ensure ecosystem services are provided from the Victorian landscape, long into the future.

These mechanisms amongst others being investigated in Victoria aim to determine the appropriate level of government and private investment beyond the 'duty of care' to ensure the sustainable provision of ecosystem services.

The Council will be soon providing advice through the Land Stewardship to government on a tangible way forward to implementing Land Stewardship for specific sustainability outcomes. It draws on a series of papers prepared in conjunction with the Department of Sustainability and Environment for the project. These papers are:

- Ecosystem Services through Land Stewardship Practices: Issues and Options
- Duty of Care: An instrument for Increasing the Effectiveness of Catchment Management
- Land Stewardship: Market-like Policy Options
- Environmental management Systems - the role of EMS in the emerging Land Stewardship concept
- Private investor needs for Land Stewardship investment Land Stewardship Social Research Project
- Summary of Legislation relating to the rural landscape in Victoria

These papers as well as the 2002 *'the Health of Our Catchments: A Victorian Report Card'* and other publications are available on the website [www.vcmc.vic.gov.au](http://www.vcmc.vic.gov.au)