

LOCAL LAND SERVICES BILL 2013

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Bill introduced on motion by Ms Katrina Hodgkinson, read a first time and printed.**Second Reading**

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck—Minister for Primary Industries, and Minister for Small Business) [4.06 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I am delighted to introduce the Local Land Services Bill 2013 on behalf of the Government. Some eight months ago this Government set out on one of the largest reforms of agricultural services since the 1940s. There was extensive consultation in relation to this legislation. It was overseen by the Local Land Services stakeholder reference panel chaired by the Natural Resources Commissioner John Keniry, AM. Mick Keogh, Executive Director, Australian Farm Institute, did an outstanding job with the stakeholder reference panel, which also consisted of the Department of Primary Industries, the Catchment Management Authority, the Livestock Health and Pest Authority, the New South Wales Farmers Association, Landcare NSW, Greening Australia and the Local Government and Shires Association.

It is important to remember that this consultation followed on from the Government's pre-election commitment to a review of the livestock health and pest authorities, which resulted in the report by Terry Ryan. That review was done following widespread concern about the Livestock Health and Pest Authority model expressed by many ratepayers across New South Wales. This process is a clear sign of the Government's commitment to the State's 42,000 farmers and many landscape managers, including those land care, bush care, coast care and rural communities across the State. The Government is one critical step closer to reform. Local Land Services will bring together a wealth of technical and advisory knowledge from parts of the Department of Primary Industries, the livestock health and pest authorities and the catchment management authorities into a modern, efficient and flexible model for service delivery. Local Land Services has been designed by farmers and landscape managers for future service delivery in this critical area.

From 2014 farmers and land managers will be able to access services and advice from the Local Land Services or the Department of Primary Industries in 139 towns across New South Wales. Local Land Services will make it easier for farmers and land managers to access advice, to improve agricultural productivity, to manage plant and animal pests and diseases, to prepare for and respond to emergencies and natural disasters and to deliver local natural resource management programs. Local Land Services will comprise 11 regions, each with a local board of seven members. The seven members will consist of four government appointments and four ratepayer-elected positions, except for the Western region which due to its size will have four elected and five appointed board members. There will be a board of chairs with an independent overall chair. The number of boundaries is being reduced across the State from the existing 25, which basically consists of the 14 livestock health and pest

authority boards and the 11 catchment management authority boards, to 11 on a new boundary area. I seek leave to table the map of the new boundaries for local land services.

Leave granted.

I will outline the most contentious areas of the map. In some areas the stakeholder panel was divided as to which local areas should go into a Local Land Services region. I have retained Murray, which was from the majority shareholder map. However, it ends at the Western Division boundary. The Western Division boundary is maintained in its existing form up to the commencement of Walgett shire. Finch county has been moved into Walgett shire. Gwydir has been moved into the north-west and Lockhart has been moved into the Riverina. I have created a new Central Tablelands, which includes mid-western regional, Cabonne, Orange, Bathurst regional, Lithgow, Oberon, Blayney and Cowra. Boorowa, Upper Lachlan shire, Yass Valley, Wingecarribee and Goulburn have moved into the south-east and Greater Taree has moved into the Hunter.

The number of directors and shares will be more than halved from 202 under livestock health and pest authorities, and catchment management authorities to 80 under Local Land Services. Through reducing duplication of governance, managerial and back-office functions we found savings in the order of \$5 million, which will be directed back into front-line extension and advisory services, whether through contracting private agronomists, partnering with farming systems groups or hiring additional staff. Local Land Services will be managed by local people on local boards working closely with landholders and communities to deliver services that are relevant to their needs. These local people are best placed to represent local landholders, not someone sitting behind a desk in Sydney.

Local boards will have real powers and will be able to make decisions about budgets, services, staff and partnerships with other organisations. Local boards will be a mix of government and ratepayer-elected positions, striking the right balance between accountability and ownership by local farmers. These reforms are about putting farmers back at the centre of the decision-making process. It is about getting behind our farmers, helping them to grow their business and preparing for future challenges. It is about creating a more robust, modern and efficient model, reducing duplication and delivering more money for front-line services.

Local Land Services will be a financially secure organisation with revenues in excess of \$500 million in the first full four years and net assets in excess of \$130 million. There will be no cost shifting to ratepayers unless the local boards and ratepayers see value and wish to pay for additional and new services by their Local Land Services. Importantly creating Local Land Services has also enabled us to create a Local Land Services Future Fund in the order of \$35 million through consolidating the accumulated cash assets of the livestock health and pest authorities and the catchment management authorities. This is the first time that such a fund has been created to support the future sustainability of primary industries and natural resource management advice in New South Wales.

The decision on how to spend these funds will rest with local boards. I place on the record my sincere thanks to all those who have taken part in the consultation process and to members of the stakeholder reference panel for giving their valuable time and expertise to the process. During the course of the stakeholder consultation 22 meetings were conducted right across New South Wales and more than 2,000 submissions were received from various organisations and individuals from right across New South Wales. Many of these submissions made a valuable contribution to the development of this bill. I thank everybody who made a contribution and those who have taken the process so genuinely and so sincerely. It is with very great pride that I commend this bill to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Paul Lynch and set down as an order of the day for a future day.