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14 July 2003

The Hon. Pam Allan MP
Chairman
Standing Committee on Natural Resource Management
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Ms Allan

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the sustainable management of natural resources in NSW. State Council believes that this inquiry will be beneficial in directing future efforts in natural resource management.

Firstly I would like to inform you of the responsibilities of Rural Lands Protection Boards (RLPBs) and the role they play in natural resource management. I have provided a brief introduction of the Rural Land Protection Board (RLPB) System below, particularly our role in pest animal and Travelling Stock Reserve and Route (TSRs) management in NSW. Attached are more specific comments related to the terms of reference of the inquiry.

The RLPB system covers 48 separate Districts across NSW. All Boards carry out the following functions:

- pest animal and insect control
- animal disease control
- the management of controlled TSRs
- control of travelling stock
- administration of stock identification systems.

Pest animal and insect control

Rural Lands Protection Boards are the peak body involved in pest animal and insect control in NSW. The *Rural Lands Protection Act 1998* (RLP Act), sets out the conditions under which animals, birds and insects can become "declared" pests and provides the process and mechanism for the control of such pest species.

Gazettal of pest species occurs through Pest Control Orders that allows the Minister for Agriculture to specify which species are pests, either on a state-wide or local basis, and the conditions or factors that apply to the control of each pest. At this point in time, rabbits, wild dogs, feral pigs and the Spur-Throated, Migratory and Australian Plague Locusts have been declared pest animals and pest insects throughout NSW.

While the RLP Act imposes legal pest eradication obligations on owners and occupiers of private land, it also binds the Crown for the control of pest animals declared under the Act. Public land managers are

required to eradicate (continuously suppress and destroy) pest animals "...to the extent necessary to minimise the risk of the pest causing damage to any land", by using any lawful method.

All RLPBs assist land managers to carry out their obligations under the RLP Act. This is partly achieved through the implementation of strategic and coordinated pest control programs involving all stakeholders, advising of the best practice control method for each pest situation and educating the community of the impacts and effects of pests in both an agricultural and environmental context. It is important to note that while Boards assist land managers to control declared pest animals, they also assist land managers in the control of other noxious animals such as foxes, mice and the like.

All RLPBs have a Pest Animal and Insect Function Management Plan that outlines the actions they will pursue with each pest animal species within their district for the year. Catchment based, cross RLPB strategic pest animal management is supported. This increases the efficiency of pest animal management and reduces the amount of pesticide or other control required for the area treated. It also slows the rate of reintroduction back into the treated area.

Travelling Stock Reserves

Over 160 years ago, a network of Crown Land in NSW was set aside to walk stock between properties and to markets. These areas are now dedicated as Travelling Stock Routes and Reserves (TSRs) and their management vested by legislation in the 48 Rural Lands Protection Boards. TSRs traverse a range of vegetation and soil types, climatic zones and topographies. Often they are on the more productive land as they follow watercourses for ease of watering stock. The importance of TSRs for travelling stock continues today with increases in transport costs and the end of the transported stock subsidies offered to landholders during drought.

The RLP Act distinguishes between two types of TSRs:

- Controlled TSRs – where the care, control and management of the TSR has been vested in the local Board.
- Managed TSRs – where the care, control and management of the TSR has NOT been vested in the local Board. This type of TSR is typically found in the Western Division where TSRs are layered over Western Lands Leases.

The above reference to “care, control and management” refers to the maintenance of the TSR land itself. This includes such activities as noxious weed control, pest animal control, and maintenance of certain fencing and other structures. In some cases where a person has occupancy of a TSR, the Board may require the person to undertake such tasks as part of the conditions of that occupancy.

It should be noted that as a result of the management practices implemented by Boards that TSRs are not only valuable for travelling stock, but are also an asset for the wider community with their historical significance and unique flora and fauna. TSRs often provide vital habitat for native flora and fauna, particularly in parts of the State where there has been widespread land clearing. In some cases, they provide wildlife corridors, which enable native animals to migrate between areas of remnant vegetation. Often the TSRs provide shelter for not only protected species, but also threatened species. There are many instances where the survival of such species is dependent on the relatively sheltered TSR environments.

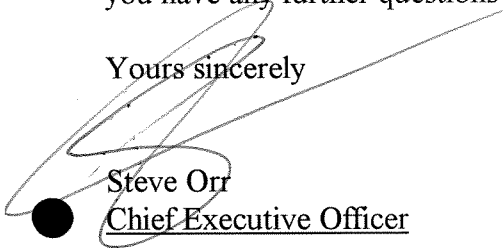
Authorised uses of TSRs include walking, running, horse riding, picnicking, fishing, swimming, and pedal cycling. Permits are required from RLPBs for walking or grazing stock, establishing apiary sites and for use by recreational and sporting groups.

All Boards are will develop a TSR Management plan for all TSRs under their care, control and management during 2002 for implementation in 2003. The RLP Act specifies that the content of these plans must include:

- ✓ The management of travelling stock reserves for the benefit of travelling stock
- ✓ The adoption of appropriate stocking practices
- ✓ The conservation of wildlife including the conservation of critical habitat and threatened species, populations and ecological communities and their habitat
- ✓ The protection of reserves against the diminution of water quality

I trust that these comments will be of assistance to the Committee when finalising their recommendations. If you have any further questions please contact Michelle Smith, TSR Manager, on telephone (02) 6391 3154.

Yours sincerely



Steve Orr
Chief Executive Officer

**Submission to standing committee on Natural Resource Management
NSW Parliament Legislative Assembly**

Current disincentives that exist for ecologically sustainable land and water use in NSW

- Different treatment of Crown land managers in environmental legislation. NPWS and State Forests etc are exempt from the operation of the Native Vegetation Conservation Act 1997 and Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995 whereas Rural Lands Protection Boards (RLPBs) are not. The intention of such legislation was to regulate use of resources on private lands and therefore does not accommodate the unique function and management arrangement of travelling stock reserves (TSRs). This therefore means that restrictions imposed by the legislation and Regional Vegetation Management plans (RVMPs) on private land also effect TSRs. In some RVMPs, TSRs have been included in the highest management zones, which will impede their use by travelling stock, the activity for which they were originally established. Furthermore it will obstruct RLPBs from fulfilling not only their responsibilities under the Rural Lands Protection Act 1998 eg pest animal control but also other legislation such as the Noxious Weeds Act 1993 and hinder day to day management.
- Lack of resourcing for RLPBs to undertake effective weed control programs and enhance environmental values on TSRs. RLPBs receive no recurrent funding from the state government to manage TSRs, which are parcels of Crown Land. The income derived from the issue of permits does not cover costs associated with management and maintenance and therefore costs are being met by the rates paid to Boards by the rural community. Furthermore Boards have increasingly looked to more secure permit arrangements which is changing the nature of their use. Native vegetation on TSRs is significant not just because it provides habitat for threatened species, has had minimal disturbance, protects water quality, prevents soil erosion and salinity, but because of the nature of the TSR system. TSRs traverse a range of vegetation and soil types, climatic zones and topographies, they are often on the more productive land following watercourses and most importantly form a network throughout the State. This network covering 600 000 hectares, is in effect a chain of reserved land acting as wildlife corridors and seed orchards and contains remnant vegetation from a vast number of ecosystems present within NSW. TSRs provide value not only as individual pieces of land containing high value remnant vegetation, but also as a network of land providing many multiplier benefits. The rural community cannot continue to pay for the management of TSRs. The costs should be paid for by the community at large through recurrent government funding.
- Restrictions on regrowth control limiting landholders ability to control woody weeds and consequently reducing carrying capacity.

- Drought assistance measures (in part) inhibit a move toward more sustainable management practices as many livestock owners continue to overstock their properties and refuse to reduce stock numbers in preparation for deteriorating seasonal conditions.

Approaches to land use management on farms, which both reduce salinity and mitigate the effects of drought

- Stocking according to land capability and early destocking in response to changes in seasonal conditions. Currently little incentive for landholders to do so as they operate within the fluctuating nature of seasons and commodity prices.
- Better long term farm planning to take into account climatic trends. Producers must accept that droughts are a normal event and therefore prepare for it to occur on a regular basis rather than assume that government assistance will be available.

Ways of increasing the up take of such land use management practices

- Education in risk management, financial management and use of technology.
- Financial and succession planning.
- Financial support for long term infrastructure support rather than short term reactive financial assistance such as transport subsidies.
- Applying rigour to carrying capacity determinations and enforcing them.

The effectiveness of management systems for ensuring that sustainability measures for the management of natural resources in NSW are achieved.

- Inadequate monitoring systems and use of those systems that are in place. Monitoring seems to exist to determine how negatively we are impacting on our natural resources as opposed to monitoring how effective new management systems are.
- Inadequate extension services provided by government agencies to assist landholder implement sustainable management practices at the property scale.
- Absence of dedicated RLPB representation on natural resource management committee's such as Catchment Management Boards, Regional Vegetation Management Committee's etc. NSW Farmers Association represents only part of the rural community whereas much greater coverage of the rural community as would occur by including RLPBs who represent all rural ratepayers. Issues such as pest animal and insect control cannot continue to be overlooked when they are critical to the sustainable management of our natural resources.