



Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association

POLICY STATEMENT

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Preferred outcome:

The public, in return for public-good environmental outcomes, should pay farmers and other private land managers who provide exceptional environmental services on their land that clearly exceed their 'duty of care' to do so.

Background:

Tasmanian farmers see themselves as good environmental stewards, as they intuitively understand that it is in their economic interest to manage their properties in an environmentally sustainable way.

However, increasingly the community is demanding that Tasmania's natural resources (eg vegetation, water, soils, wildlife) be managed and conserved in ways that may restrict farmers in their current and future activities.

Tasmanian farmers believe increasing environmental expectations by the community are forcing them to exceed their duty of care to the environment.

Considerations here are:

- Tasmanian farmers have traditionally been active participants in Government funded environmental programs, including the National Landcare Program, Natural Heritage Trust and National Action Plan for Salinity & Water Quality.
- The TFGA is a supporting partner to private land conservation programs, including the Non-Forest Vegetation Program and Protected Areas on Private Land, so as to facilitate farmer participation and advocate farmer views in program design.
- Traditional funding programs are based on a philosophy of set-and-forget, including management prescriptions and once-off payments, Generally they:
 - do not define the actual environmental outcome that is to be maintained or enhanced over what period;
 - do not recognise the ongoing, often perpetual, on-ground management regime that is required season-to-season to maintain the environmental values being sought;
 - "lock-in" prescriptions with no means to accommodate future changes in environmental condition or new science-based learnings;

- Offer limited technical information and support and once a funding agreement is signed there is very little if any follow-up from Government or funding program officers.
- What appears to farmers to be a disconnect between various often unco-ordinated environment funding programs and increasing “unfriendly” environmental policy and regulations.
- Industry groups’ lead by the NFF opposes trade distorting production subsidies. Stewardship approaches must define a clear environmental outcome, eg protection of a threatened species, and would therefore not be a production subsidy.

There is growing recognition that a new direction is needed to better recognise the role that farmers and their good management practices play in the provision of ecosystem services.

Incentives-based, Environmental Stewardship programmes, are being proposed by farming and conservation groups alike that work with appropriate regulation to deliver exceptional environmental outcomes.

Environmental Land Stewardship programs would fundamentally broaden the approach from one based on purely regulation to one also based on voluntary land management agreements where public benefits from private land can be clearly demonstrated.

Our Position:

Definition of Environmental Land Stewardship

‘Environmental Stewardship is a broad term used to describe how landholders, (including farmers) manage the natural resources on their land. All farmers are environmental stewards who have a legal obligation to meet a reasonable duty of care to the environment. Some farmers however, undertake activities that are clearly beyond their reasonable duty of care and are therefore exceptional environmental stewards’.

How should it work?

The TFGA supports the development of a simple, transparent and secure Environmental Land Stewardship system that supports and pays farmers when their environmental stewardship activities clearly exceed a reasonable duty of care and public-good outcomes are achieved.

Stewardship programmes should be funded through an investment framework based on rolling trust funds that are independent from current three-year funding cycles.

Farmers, recognising the environmental value of their properties and associated environmental services, would enter into a contract with the Government to deliver agreed environmental outcomes in return for periodic payments, as described in a fixed term “rolling” management agreements.

The value of environmental outcomes to the public should be determined based on good science and consistent agreed data.

How the farmer achieves the agreed outcomes over the agreed timeframe is up to them as the experienced land manager, thereby allowing for management flexibility.

Transparent mechanisms should be developed which provide good performance accountability function and reporting linked to management approaches.

Administrative processes must be highly efficient with low transaction costs, which allow maximum resources to be put towards management agreements.

Government as the purchaser of public good environmental outcomes is participating in a partnership with the land manager. Stewardship programs must include ongoing provision for extension, technical and monitoring support.

Industry groups like the TFGA should assist farmers to understand stewardship programmes and help them to negotiate and document stewardship arrangements.

Stewardship payments should be realistic and focus on the financial benefit to the producer in a way that gives immediate value to the business and so builds in the longer-term success of the program.

Reporting functions should be based on environmental outcomes and a self-assessment approach should be taken wherever possible and practical.

An effective risk analysis should be undertaken for the Stewardship programme, which involves all stakeholders to identify all the outcomes (both intended and unintended) that might occur (including tax implications).

In Tasmania

An Environmental Land Stewardship Pilot programme should be administered and managed by NRM regional bodies.

A Property Management Systems Framework should be utilised as a benchmark and risk management process for management agreements.

A coordinated approach should be taken between TFGA, NRM bodies, Government and research organisations to ensure that strategic opportunities with research and other organisations are maximised.

Next steps required

Developing environmental land stewardship programs is a high priority for the TFGA.

Any programs should be designed with farmers for farmers and TFGA and its members are in a good position to reflect on current producer and industry needs and appropriate delivery mechanisms.

The options available include:

1. The creation of an Environmental Land Stewardship initiative for Tasmania; or
2. The adjustment of existing private land conservation programs to widen their scope.

TFGA believes that a good point to start is to jointly establish a working group and a set of criteria to assess the potential for an Environmental Land Stewardship pilot program in Tasmania.

A key question will be to define and demonstrate “environmental services”.

Related Policy Statements:

- The TFGA’s overall position on Environmental and Natural Resource Management (NRM) issues