

Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association

Policy Roundup

March / April 2008

Key issues for the TFGA Policy Unit for March and April included:

Tasmanian Irrigation Development Board – The TFGA welcomed the State Government's establishment of a new high-powered Tasmanian Irrigation Development Board (TIDB). The TIDB is responsible for providing the drive, governance and business acumen required to deliver on what will be a very significant program of irrigation infrastructure projects across Tasmania.

Government clearly took on board the views of TFGA and other rural stakeholders in how it is putting this program together. We particularly welcomed public commitments by Water Minister David Llewellyn that the Board will need to develop appropriate partnership and consultative arrangements with local project proponents, as well as the TFGA.

The Board's Chairman and CEO met with the TFGA Board in early April. Subsequently the President and Manager Policy & Government Relations met with the TIDB to discuss how the two organisations can work together. This might include elements of delivering property management plans (PMP's) to farmers in irrigation districts, training and extension, and general communication activities as well as higher level "policy" discussions.

Staff are now engaged in discussions with senior DPIW officials regarding how PMP's could be designed and used to satisfy Federal and State environmental regulations, and to support the adoption of best practice irrigation and land management practices. Demonstrating long term environmental sustainability is a key issue that must be satisfied before Government capital funding will flow to any of the priority irrigation projects.

Environment Policy Council - Key Outcomes of the *Environment Policy Council* meeting of 27 March 2008 included:

- Recommended to the Board the adoption of the Draft Policy Unit Operational Plan for 2008/09 which outlines the policy work program and how it will be undertaken, for the coming year.
- A presentation and discussion with Greg Johannes, Director State Climate Change Office. The Council resolved that climate change is a key strategic policy campaign (as detailed in the Draft Policy Unit Operational Plan), with issues relevant across all policy areas. Consequently the TFGA's Climate Change Taskforce will be reconvened and a range of actions undertaken to build capacity of the TFGA and members to respond.
- A presentation from Peter Lee-Archer, DPIW Manager Spray Referral Unit, on proposed new chemical spray regulations.
- Recommended the establishment of a Taskforce to consider TFGA endorsement of a revised Good Neighbour Charter for Commercial Forestry.

- Resolved that TFGA responds to the current Federal Review of Biosecurity and Quarantine Arrangements via contributing to the NFF's submission, plus registering a separate letter of interest to the review.
- Resolved to write to relevant federal Ministers to seek clarification on issues arising with the new Caring for Our Country funding program.
- Provided advice to the TFGA Board in their consideration of a proposed new National Irrigators Council.

Water

National Irrigators Council (NIC) – The Manager of Policy & Government Relations represented TFGA at a national summit of irrigators in Sydney looking to establish a new national irrigator's lobby group. Subsequently the interim Chairman of the National Irrigators Council and the CEO of NSW Irrigators attended a TFGA Board meeting to discuss potential TFGA involvement. Whilst the TFGA Board fully appreciated and is supportive of the issues being raised by the Council, it is concerned that the voice of farmers is being split in Canberra, with the NFF also representing irrigator's concerns. At this stage the TFGA has expressed interest in only being an interested stakeholder in the NIC.

Great Forester Irrigators – With support of Jeremy Carins, the local representative on the TFGA's Water Standing Committee, we are closely watching developments in the review of the Great Forester Catchment Water Management Plan. Currently we're encouraging all local irrigators to liaise with their industry representatives on the community consultative committee to have input on proposed changes to the water sharing regime. TFGA will most probably hold a follow-up irrigators meeting once the draft amended plan is released by DPIW.

Clyde Irrigators – We continue to support the Clyde Group's efforts and watch developments in the long-running federal assessment of the potential emergency drought release from the lakes.

Water Standing Committee - Key outcomes of the **Water Standing Committee** meeting held on 3 March included:

- A briefing on the status of the irrigation water infrastructure development program.
- A briefing from DPIW on the outcomes of the Ringarooma Comprehensive Catchment Modelling Project, which is quantifying potential impacts of plantation water interception. The committee urged DPIW to prepare a briefing report to present the project results to the Ringarooma Community and more widely.
- Welcomed the significant breakthrough with Government on extending the tenure of water licenses from ten to forty years and congratulated the Policy Manager and Chairman for their efforts in this regard.
- Resolved to escalate discussions with Government to ensure a comprehensive strategy to the rollout of water meters, including financial incentives towards the installation costs.
- Resolved to continue to support Great Forester Irrigators to raise concerns regarding the review of the Catchment Water Management Plan.
- Resolved to recommend that TFGA explore the possibility of involvement with a proposed new National Irrigators Council and supported the Policy Manager to

attend the related National Irrigators Summit being convened by NSW Irrigators Council and Irrigators Australia Limited.

Native Vegetation

Protected Areas on Private Land Program: Current activities of Mary Whitaker, the TFGA's Native Vegetation Officer based in Outlands, include:

- 6 new inquiries;
- 3 new property visits;
- ongoing negotiations with 21 property owners regarding PAPL covenants;
- So far 8 covenants have been referred to DPIW for processing;
- Follow-up with landholders & DPIW with outstanding non-forest vegetation agreements;
- Continue to assist with general native vegetation inquiries from TFGA members and working closely with Jo Field.

The Policy Manager and PAPL Officer continue to work with the other PAPL program partners (DPIW, TLC and Federal National Reserves System) about how the program might develop into the future with a view to seeking continued funding.

Threatened Native Vegetation Information – Current activities of Jo Field, Native Vegetation Project Officer, include

- Presentation at Dairy Council, Wool Council, Meat Council, Native Vegetation Standing Committee meeting
- Presentation to TFGA's Tamar Valley Branch members
- Presentation to PFT (Southern) staff
- Follow up (field trips) on 2 'cold call' enquires relating to project including issues on FPP's.
- Presentation at NRM Glamorgan-Spring Bay group
- Presentation to TFGA's King Island Branch members
- Presentation to Meander Resource Management Group
- Presentation to East Coast Primary Producers
- Liaise with King Island NRM Officer; Glamorgan-Spring Bay NRM Officer.
- Attend Red Meat Field Day at Winnaleah, liaising with attendees
- 55 Information Packs handed out
- Discussions on one-to-one basis with 8 TFGA members
- 2 articles in Tas Country and 1 in TFGA Primary Focus
- Facilitate completion of 13 of the 22 threatened forest communities' information sheets, liaising with members of the TFGA's FPAC Taskforce and the FPA's Biodiversity Section.

Key outcomes of the ***Native Vegetation Standing Committee*** held on 6 March, included

- A briefing on the status of potential listing under Federal and State legislation of lowland temperate grasslands of Tasmania as threatened native vegetation communities. The committee supported TFGA's prosecution of this issue to date in that voluntary stewardship approaches will be more successful for lasting conservation of grasslands than regulatory approaches.

- Provided feedback to Jo Field on her role providing information and extension advice to farmers on threatened native vegetation communities legislation.
- Endorsed efforts by TFGA working with, DPIW and Tasmanian Land Conservancy to expand the scope of the Protected Areas on Private Land Program so that it offers greater flexibility and financial recognition of conservation on private land, and to seek further federal funding.
- Resolved to recommend to the TFGA Board that the unresolved issues around the dormant TFGA Forestry Committee be addressed as a matter of urgency, so to ensure that interests of TFGA levy paying commercial farm forestry interests are being represented.

Game Management

Key outcomes of the ***Game Management Standing Committee*** meeting held on 4 March included:

- A briefing from Rural Development Services on their project examining farmer attitudes to the use of 1080.
- A briefing from John Dawson, DPIW, on the status of the Alternatives to 1080 Program.
- Noted developments in pending State Cat Control Legislation and a joint briefing for the Game Committee and Wool Council will be arranged for early April.
- Resolved to recommend the TFGA Board supports a proposal by Lenah Game Meats to request a license for commercial use (human consumption) of wild deer taken under crop protection permits.
- Resolved to seek clarification from Jim Cox, Police Minister regarding the status of Firearms Act amendments and Government's response to the joint parliamentary committee into minor's access to firearms.

Weeds

Weeds Wall Chart – Alicia Palmer has been working with Weed Standing Committee Chairman Phil Reader to produce a Weeds Wall Chart. Phil and Alicia recently met with David Land (DPIW), Sandy Leighton (STCA), Greg Stewart (NRM North) and Greg Taylor (NRM Cradle Coast), to progress the idea of producing a wall chart, that will display information of some of Tasmania's most prominent weeds. The "mock up" was a hit at Agfest, with complete copies ready for distribution sometime in May.

Weeds Standing Committee - Key outcomes of the ***Weeds Standing Committee*** meeting held on the 13 March, included:

- Expressed concerns about the new federal Caring for Our Country Program and apparent reductions in funding to NRM programs and what this means for weeds control programs.
- Noted TFGA's submission on the Cradle Coast NRM Draft Weed Hygiene Action Plan. Generally, TFGA supported the Plan which is aimed at reducing weed spread in Tasmania, but questioned some of the strategic actions outlined in the Plan that may represent further red tape for land owners.
- The Committee resolved to support a working group to progress the production of a weeds calendar for publication. The group consists of Phil Reader (TFGA), Alicia Palmer (TFGA), Greg Stewart (NRM North), Greg

Taylor (NRM Cradle Coast), Sandy Leighton (STCA) and David Lane (DPIW). The calendar will likely be a wall planner type display with photographs of high priority weeds and optimal weed eradication times and methods detailed. The working group would aim to have this project at a basic stage by Agfest for promotion (by likely not ready for distribution).

- The TFGA Policy Unit will be preparing a Weeds in Hay survey in conjunction with the Committee, which will be sent to members, to assist in the identification of the key issues with weeds in hay, and to form the basis of an awareness campaign.
- The Committee also agreed on its 4 main policy issues for weeds, these are:
 - Weeds in corridors;
 - Weeds in hay;
 - Weeds awareness programme; and
 - Commonwealth funding for state weeds initiatives.

Property Management Systems

FarmSAT 2 – The Farm Self Assessment Tool enables producers with a practical tool to assessment environmental management issues on-farm. The TFGA has secured funding from the Natural Heritage Trust to continue to roll-out FarmSAT tool over 2007/08. Activities noted by Tony Clarke, Project Manager, included:

- Total FarmSAT visits 108.
- 35 farmers signed up to FarmSAT at Agfest in addition to direct mailout and follow-up phone calls in progress.
- Milestone 3 report completed and accepted by DAFF.
- Attended a service providers workshop with DairyTas.
- Attended a climate change forum with DairyTas.
- Had several meetings with RDS about fully integrating FarmSAT into their delivery of PMP.
- RDS have been engaged to undertake a review of the status of EMS in Tasmania, as part of identifying future pathways for EMS.
- Completed training for Australian Wool Network. This is in addition to the 33 facilitators now trained in the use of FarmSAT.
- A forum on the future of EMS in Tasmania is being held on 29 may at TFGA House.
- FarmSAT is supporting a Cradle Coast NRM “Soils Field Day” in June.
- Draft final project report submitted to DAFF.

Statewide Property Management Systems Framework – We are looking forward to commencing the next stage in the development of a Statewide PMS Framework to guide the use and recognition of property management plans. With greater impetus through things like the draft amended PAL Policy, Irrigation Development Board and NRM Regions all referring to the framework, negotiations are underway with NRM North for TFGA to host a new project manager’s position.

Other Issues:

Quarantine and Biosecurity – Following comment from across commodity council and environment committee representatives, the TFGA provided input to the NFF's submission to the Federal Quarantine and Biosecurity Review. The TFGA also formally registered as an interested stakeholder to the review.

Aerial and Ground Spraying – We anticipate Minister Llewellyn releasing in early May new draft regulations for the control of ground and aerial spraying. This will be a significant issue across all farmers who use chemicals. Hence the EPC and staff are preparing for a significant process of engagement with commodity councils, environment committees and members to form a TFGA submission.

TFGA Gene Technology Roadshow - The TFGA Gene Technology Roadshow is scheduled to take place from 27– 29 May 2008. It will be visiting the Southern region (Kempton); Northern region (Launceston) and North West region (Burnie). Promotional material will be launched at the end of April 2008.

Four key speakers have been secured: Dr Max Foster, ABARE; Dr Lucy Carter, University of Queensland and specialist in gene ethics; Dr Alan Richardson, CSIRO Plant Science and Dr Craig Cormick, Biotechnology Australia.

The objective of the forums is to inform participants on developments and trends with regard to the science and general application of gene technology, its use in agriculture around the world and its acceptance or otherwise in markets for agricultural products. The forums will also address concerns which are expressed about gene technology.

Forestry and Farming – A taskforce of Roger Swain, Kem Perkins, Peter France and Ashley Bastock met with representatives from Forestry Tasmania and FIAT. This was regarding a proposed updated Good Neighbour Charter for Commercial Forestry and also to discuss potentially formalising broader engagement protocols between the two sectors.

Tamar Valley Branch – Ashley Bastock and Jo Field recently attended a meeting of the TFGA Tamar Valley Branch. Jo provided information on threatened native vegetation communities' legislation. Staff are following up on issues raised by the branch including the use of conservation offsets and the proposed Bell Bay Pulp Mill water pipeline.

Climate Change – Staff are continuing to work with James Walch, Chair of TFGA Climate Change Taskforce, in keeping a watching brief on Climate Change Developments nationally. The taskforce is also keeping an eye out for the State Climate Change Strategy.

Environmental Law: Practical Guide for Tasmanian Farmers – The Guide is soon to be finalised, with forums to be held next month. The forums will be a great way for members to discuss the guide with people who have had an active role in producing it.

Cat Control Legislation – Joint Briefing – A Joint Briefing was held for the Game Management Standing Committee and Wool Council on proposed State Government Cat Control Legislation. Kate Kent, General Manager of Strategic Policy at DPIW provided an overview of the proposed legislation. We anticipate Government releasing a formal consultation paper later in the year.

Draft Rail Infrastructure Bill – Drainage – While the TFGA has contributed to significant improvements being made in the Draft Rail Infrastructure Bill, the issue of drainage around railways is yet to be addressed. TFGA’s Phil Reader, Rupert Gregg, and Alicia Palmer recently met with representatives from the Department of Infrastructure Energy and Resources to discuss this issue. It is hoped that the Department and TFGA can continue to work to find a solution to this issue, and that this will be reflected in the legislation.

Ashley Bastock
Manager, Policy & Government Relations