



Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association

POLICY STATEMENT

Overall position on Environmental and Natural Resource Management (NRM) Issues

Preferred Outcome:

Tasmanian agriculture contributes 16% to gross state product and 20% to State employment. Tasmanian farmers require secure access to their land and related resources, and freedom to manage these to best effect, to enable sustainable and profitable agriculture.

A paradigm of rewarding farmers for doing the right thing, will be more effective than rules and regulations at fostering their good will, leading to positive action and where required, uptake of more sustainable farming practices.

Background:

Tasmanian farmers are managers of our State's unique rural landscapes for multiple outcomes including,

- production of safe, clean and affordable food and fibre;
- enhancing biodiversity, native flora and fauna;
- maintaining healthy catchment areas;
- providing landscape amenity and recreational opportunities.

Most Tasmanian farmers also have a sense of "stewardship" with regard to how they manage their land, first and foremost because it is in their own best interests. Agricultural productivity relies on natural resources and it's the goal of just about every farmer to pass on their land in a better condition, both productively and environmentally, than when they received it.

On the other hand farmers must be able to manage their land to best effect in a changing and very competitive world if they are to remain in business. They are finding it increasingly difficult to do so given constraints imposed by Government.

Farmers are currently unfairly wearing the burden associated with providing the 'public good' environmental outcomes that are being demanded by and mostly benefit the wider urban community.

Farmers consider that beyond their reasonable duty of care to do so, they are providing these additional environmental "services" at their own cost – free-of-charge to the community.

Our Position:

The TFGA supports the following *principles* in relation to environmental and natural resource management issues.

Recognition

- Farmers should be recognised for the good work they already do with regard to adopting farming systems that maintain a balance between agricultural production and environmental responsibility. Active involvement of the farm sector as an expansive and critically important class of land tenure is vital for achieving the community's expectations for the environment.

The farming community itself has an important role in promoting this fact to the wider community.

Resource Security

- Farmers can afford to invest in environmental sustainability if they are operating in a profitable business environment. To provide farmers and their financiers with the investment security required to do so necessitates:
 - Long-term ownership rights to land and water;
 - Certainty of land use, and clear risk assignment if the rules change;
 - Flexible on-farm management approaches to environmental management that facilitates innovation.
- Voluntary approaches that support farmers to manage environmental issues are more effective than regulation, i.e. carrots versus sticks.

Furthermore, a reliance on prescriptive rules and regulations without promoting complimentary management practices is in itself unlikely to realise the long-term conservation of environmental values being sought, or facilitate a transition to more sustainable farming.

- Where Government environmental standards exceed a reasonable duty of care, the broader community should pay farmers for providing this additional environmental service on their behalf.

Innovative and voluntary agri-environmental approaches are required that reward the positive contribution that farmers make as environmental stewards.

- Environmental stewardship programs won't suit all farmers or situations. Accordingly compensation must be payable if a farmer's ownership rights of land and water are removed, encumbered or constrained to achieve 'public good' environmental outcomes.

Principles of natural justice

- Individuals should have access to low cost appeals mechanisms to an independent arbitrator so that they can appeal against decisions that affect them.
- Government regulation for 'public good' environmental outcomes must provide farmers with structural adjustment at the current market rate for any reduction in the value of their land.