



**TASMANIAN FARMERS AND GRAZIERS  
ASSOCIATION**

**Submission to the  
Tasmanian Government's  
2007/08 State Budget Process**

**6 October 2006**

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## **Introduction and Executive Summary**

The Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association are pleased to present to the Tasmanian Government its submission to the 2007/08 State Budget process.

This submission outlines the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association's recommendations to the State Government on how funding and resources should be allocated to meet the needs of the Tasmanian farming sector during 2007-08.

We have consulted with a wide range of industry stakeholders to develop and prioritise this set of recommendations in a way that best meets the greatest and most immediate needs of industry members. The TFGA Board have formally endorsed this submission.

We urge the Tasmanian Government to consider the important recommendations of our budget submission as vital steps to achieving a more sustainable and profitable farming sector.

### **About TFGA**

The Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association (TFGA) is the peak representative organisation for farmers in Tasmania. The Association has some 5,000 members in the dairy, wool, meat, vegetable and cereals and seeds industries and members are also involved in the production of poppies and a range of minor agricultural crops. Apart from agricultural crops many of our members are involved in the management of native forest and plantations for commercial wood production. With most farmers in Tasmania being members, TFGA speaks with authority on issues that are important to rural farming communities.

The TFGA is divided into separate councils and committees that deal with each of the major commodities. The organisation plays an active role in ensuring that the policies and concerns of the agricultural sector are recognised by Government, industry and the wider community, and are given a high level of consideration at all levels of the decision-making process. It is one of the few industries in Tasmania to have such a comprehensive industry organisation.

The TFGA has in recent years, reformed the way it manages its involvement with environmental and natural resource issues, through establishment of an Environment Policy Council and four Standing Committees (Vegetation, Water, Game, Weeds). This reflects TFGA's growing recognition that there is an ongoing need to keep improving the profitability and sustainability of farm enterprises across the agricultural sector.

## Summary of Recommendations

The main recommendations identified in this report, in order of priority include:

Recommendation 1:

That the Tasmanian Government allocates an additional \$600,000 over the next 3 years for the development of a Property Management Systems (PMS) Framework for Tasmania, including an allocation of \$200,000 in the 2007-08 Budget.

Recommendation 2:

That the Tasmanian Government implements additional long term State Budget funding to the continuation of the Fox Free Taskforce to not only eradicate foxes from Tasmania, but to maintain Tasmania as 'fox free' into the future.

Recommendation 3:

That the Tasmanian Government maintain a fund of at least \$1,000,000 for compensation payments to land owners who are prevented by regulation from clearing and converting non forest vegetation on their land, and budget \$2,500,000 to maintain a credible conservation agreements program with land owners.

Recommendation 4:

That the Tasmanian Government provide \$500,000 pa funding for four full time staff in the Game Management Unit to resource a program of active promotion of property based game management plans, and to develop the concept of wildlife population management planning.

Recommendation 5:

That the Tasmanian Government extends the SMART Farming Water Initiative as an ongoing 3 -year rolling investment in budget allocations for 2009-10.

Recommendation 6:

That the Tasmanian Government provide additional funding of \$500,000 pa to the Forest Practices Authority to allow the organisation to increase its capacity to cope with the expanding task of the FPA as it assumes responsibility for regulation of non forest vegetation clearance and conversion.

Recommendation 7:

That the Tasmanian Government put a more effective system of weed control in place for Corridor Weed Management, relating to both main road and rail easements.

Recommendation 8:

That the Tasmanian Government implements a more extensive domestic cat control program and a feral cat eradication program for Tasmania in conjunction with the Fox Free Taskforce.

**Recommendation 1:**

That the Tasmanian Government allocates an additional \$600,000 over the next 3 years for the development of a Property Management Systems (PMS) Framework for Tasmania, including an allocation of \$200,000 in the 2007-08 Budget.

**Lead Department:**

Department of Primary Industries and Water

**Rationale:**

Farmers are coming under increasing pressure to demonstrate various levels of assurance relating to the environment, food safety, animal welfare and OH & S in addition to managing core business activities. With decreasing terms of trade, skilled labour shortages, increased regulation and rising fuel costs, it is no surprise that farmers are increasingly frustrated and overwhelmed by the growing complexity of farming operations.

Assistance is urgently needed to assist farmers to deal with these issues in the most strategic and cost effective way and ensure that good farming practices are adequately recognised through reduced regulatory burden, better incentive schemes, improved public recognition and continued market access. TFGA believes that Property Management Systems provide a means of assisting farmers to meet this challenge.

There are four main ways that Property Management Systems can assist primary producers:

- Improve business management and performance;
- Demonstrate regulatory compliance;
- Ensure long term environmental sustainability; and
- Maintain market access.

The TFGA believes that the implementation of a Property Management Systems (PMS) Framework will significantly increase the rate of adoption of PMS by the agricultural sector and also meet the needs of a number of other stakeholders, including Government and regional NRM groups.

**Common standards**

There are currently a number of different approaches to PMS being implemented, which is confusing and cost prohibitive. A PMS Framework would develop an agreed set of standards as a benchmark, which will improve the overall consistency and credibility of PMS without duplicating existing services and activities. This would increase the rate of adoption of PMS and help Government agencies, NRM groups and industry organisations to integrate the requirements of various programs through one PMS process. The Framework will initially focus on the development of an agreed PMS process and environmental management benchmarks with other management issues added to the Framework over time.

**Helping farmers to meet regulatory requirements**

Some government agencies require landowners to provide some form of property level management plan in order to access resources such as water or vegetation, or to participate in various schemes. This means that landowners may have to develop several separate plans for separate agencies, which takes time and can be very frustrating.

The PMS Framework standards will consist of several modules. It is hoped that landowners will be able to use relevant modules to address their specific regulatory needs. One of the tasks for the Framework will be to work closely with Government agencies to investigate the potential of integrating documentation requirements into these modules as a Government accredited process. This could help to streamline some Government approval processes, saving application time, reducing confusion and the chance of mistakes.

#### Stewardship Scheme

If the wider community expects private landholders to manage native vegetation and biodiversity on private land, there should be more equitable cost sharing arrangements that support farmers to supply 'public good' outcomes. The Framework can help to facilitate this process and provide verification processes to manage these types of service agreements.

The Framework could also provide a central reference for a wider range of NRM incentives and recognition mechanisms to be threaded through the PMS process by various stakeholders.

The implementation of a PMS Framework is a crucial investment into our rural farming sector. Without funding the Framework, we run the risk of eroding our Tasmanian quality brand image, unnecessarily increasing the regulatory burden on farmers and failing to capitalise on the benefits that a PMS Framework will deliver.

The TFGA is proposing that the PMS Framework be jointly funded between the State and Australian Government. It is appropriate that the Tasmanian Government takes the lead first by demonstrating its genuine commitment of resources to the project through the 2007-08 Budget process, which will in turn encourage Australian Government to make a matching commitment.

#### **Estimated Cost:**

\$200,000 per annum with matching funds from the Australian Government.

Includes salary, oncosts, office, communication, project management and administration.

#### **Link to Tasmania Together:**

- Goal 19 Have an internationally focused business culture that creates business investment and growth and encourages enterprise, innovation and excellence.
- Goal 20 Promote our island advantages including our 'clean-green' image, natural resources, location and people.
- Goal 22 Value, protect and maintain our natural diversity.
- Goal 23 Ensure there is a balance between environmental protection and economic and social development.
- Goal 24 Ensure our natural resources are managed in a sustainable way now and for future generations.

**Recommendation 2:**

That the Tasmanian Government implements additional long term State Budget funding to the continuation of the Fox Free Taskforce to not only eradicate foxes from Tasmania, but to maintain Tasmania as 'fox free' into the future.

**Lead Department:**

Department of Primary Industries and Water

**Rationale:**

The Tasmanian Government has a commitment to the people of Tasmania to control pests already in the state and prevent the introduction of any new pest, as stated in the Tasmania Together Plan.

Tasmania is a haven to 77 species of mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians that are largely terrestrial or ground breeding and weigh between 5 grams and 5 kilograms. These species would be most at risk of predation or competition from foxes.

Many species now extinct or under threat on mainland Australia continue to survive in relative abundance in Tasmania. For example, the eastern quoll, Tasmanian bettong and Tasmanian pademelon are now extinct on the mainland. Other species such as the spotted-tail quoll, eastern barred bandicoot and the ground parrot have seriously declined on the mainland but retain a stronghold in Tasmania.

A report, 'Foxes in Tasmania: A report on an incursion by an invasive species,' outlines several issues that are considered critical for the eradication of invasive species including:

- A core of field and research expertise is needed to lead the eradication effort from beginning to end in order to maximize efficiency;
- An eradication program needs regular modifications based on field experience and ongoing research;
- It becomes progressively more difficult and expensive to remove the last remaining individuals of an invasive population with low visible returns for high investment late in the program; and
- It is important to maintain political and administrative support to complete the program.

Using the above factors as a guide, the review team believes it would be a major risk to completely disband the Taskforce in 2006-07.

TFGA concurs that it would be an unacceptable risk to disband the Taskforce in 2006-07 and believes the Fox Free Taskforce should be continually funded towards three main areas:

- An eradication program to kill any foxes that may be currently present in Tasmania;
- Scientific research to understand the potential impacts of foxes upon Tasmanian wildlife and to refine fox eradication measures to minimise non-target damage; and
- A broad awareness and information strategy to encourage all Tasmanians to assist the eradication program.

Adult male foxes can disperse up to 300 kilometres, which means a more extensive and continuous approach to fox eradication is needed. The large distances adult males can travel means the size of Tasmania, being 6.3 million hectares, needs to be put into perspective when analysing the area that needs to be controlled.

The TFGA proposes that additional funds are made available to the Taskforce to implement an ongoing broad-scale fox baiting program for at least the next 10 years.

**Estimated Cost:**

A minimum of \$600,000 per year to maintain current commitments.

In addition to new funds to implement the following activities:

- Broad-scale baiting (0.5 million hectares);
- Research alternative measures to eradicate feral animals; and
- Community education.

**Link to Tasmania Together:**

Goal 20 (1): To maintain and improve quarantine services.

Goal 23: Ensure there is a balance between environmental protection and economic and social development.

Goal 24: Ensure our natural resources are managed in a sustainable way now and for future generations.

**References:**

Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre (2004): Foxes in Tasmania: A report on an incursion by an invasive species’.

Animal Health Australia, AUSVETPLAN (version 3.2, 2005): ‘Wild Animal Response Strategy’,

Department of Primary Industries and Water: [www.dpiw.tas.gov.au](http://www.dpiw.tas.gov.au)

**Recommendation 3:**

That the Tasmanian Government maintain a fund of at least \$1,000,000 for compensation payments to land owners who are prevented by regulation from clearing and converting non forest vegetation on their land, and budget \$2,500,000 to maintain a credible conservation agreements program with land owners.

**Lead Department**

Department of Primary Industries and Water

**Rationale**

In recent years, the Tasmanian Government has been developing private property conservation agreements for non-forest vegetation communities, specifically for the protection of threatened species communities at risk from land clearance and conversion. An important element of this program has been the provision of compensation payments to land owners who are prevented by regulation from clearing and converting non-forest vegetation on their land, beyond a reasonable level of duty of care. A second important element has been the active encouragement of voluntary protection of non-forest vegetation by individual landowners by agreement with the Government, usually in return for financial payments by the Government.

Provision for compensation is an important part of legislation on this issue currently in the parliament. This legislation has passed the House of Assembly and is due to be debated in the Legislative Council in the next few weeks. It is highly likely that it will have been passed and enacted well before the start of the 2007-08 financial year. In the circumstances there needs to be provision made in the budget for 2007-08, and thereafter, for funding to cover compensation payments. In the absence of more precise guidelines and an indication of how often compensation will be required, establishment and maintenance of a fund of \$1,000,000 is an appropriate provision in this regard.

The Tasmanian Government currently maintains a program designed to test and implement voluntary agreement options with regard to conservation of non-forest vegetation on private land. This is funded by a combination of State and Australian Government funding. The total level of such funding needs to be maintained at a minimum of \$2,500,000 pa if we are to see program momentum build to the level necessary to deliver credible outcomes across the State. This funding would be used to maintain staffing and processes within DPIW, and to cover a level of landowner payments sufficient to road test and then routinely deliver agreement options.

**Estimated Cost**

\$1,000,000 for private property compensation payments.

\$2,500,000 for voluntary agreements program for non-forest vegetation conservation.

**Link to Tasmania Together**

Goal 21: Value, protect and conserve our natural diversity.

Goal 24: Ensure our natural resources are managed in a sustainable way now and for future generations.

**Recommendation 4:**

That the Tasmanian Government maintain at least \$500,000 pa funding for four full time staff in the Game Management Unit to resource a program of active promotion of property based game management plans and to develop the concept of wildlife population management planning.

**Lead Department**

Department of Primary Industries and Water

**Rationale**

Browsing damage by wildlife is an ongoing problem for Tasmanian farmers. Major economic impacts to the farming community are on pasture and tree seedlings, but a range of other crops are also affected. Major pests are wallaby and possum, and rabbits at a local level.

The Tasmanian Government has adopted the policy that 1080 poison should only be used as a last resort to manage pests, with permits only issued where officials believe browsing is at an unacceptable level in spite of fencing and shooting control programs.

The Government promotes Property Based Game Management Plans as an integrated approach to browsing damage control. As an incentive, the Government has streamlined the process of assessing and approving 1080 permit applications for farmers who have game management plans in place. This has resulted in a steady uptake of game management plans and increased pressure upon DPIW staff responsible for assisting farmers to develop game management plans.

Whilst the uptake of game management plans has increased, the number of 1080 permits allocated to the agricultural sector has significantly declined from 277 in 2000 to 54 in 2006. Although this is the desired outcome, it does raise an issue about how DPIW will continue to fund current staff levels in the game management unit, given that it is the funds from 1080 permits that have provided the main source of revenue to support these positions in the past. A solid commitment by DPIW to the maintenance of sufficient staff levels regardless of revenue source is needed.

Individual property game management plans work best when they are part of an integrated regional scale game management program. Until populations are managed at a regional level, they will continue to place unsustainable pressure on individual properties – regardless of whether these have individual game management plans in place. There is a need for Government to begin serious work on the development of regional Wildlife Population Management Plans as a basis for a more holistic approach to regional game management.

The TFGA believes that it is essential to maintain at least four full time staff within the Game Management Unit given the current demand on staff to assist farmers to develop game management plans, assess applications for game management permits, and develop regional Wildlife Population Management Plans.

**Estimated Cost**

\$500,000 for four Game Management Unit staff.

**Link to Tasmania Together**

Goal 20: Promote our island advantages including our “clean-green” image, natural resources, location and people.

Goal 24: Ensure our natural resources are managed in a sustainable way now and for future generations.

**Recommendation 5:**

That the Tasmanian Government extends the SMART Farming Water Initiative as an ongoing 3 -year rolling investment in budget forecasts for 2009-10.

**Lead Department**

Department of Primary Industries and Water

**Rationale**

The SMART Farming Water Initiative (the "Initiative") announced in the 2006 budget of \$7.54 million over four years represents a significant opportunity to shore up existing water supplies for irrigated agriculture and achieve reliable and sustainable additional irrigation supplies.

As noted by DPIW the initiative was based on independent analysis that an additional 150,000 ML per annum of irrigation water is required in 2015 to meet 10-year growth forecasts for agriculture. This represents an increase of 40% on existing levels.

To achieve such growth targets for new sustainable water development projects requires significant long-term Government commitment to the Agricultural Industry. Long-term Government commitment will provide the level of investor confidence needed to facilitate clear market and demand driven water development opportunities that the Government is seeking via phase 2 of the Water Development Plan.

Success of the initiative fundamentally relies on engaging individual irrigators and/or groups of irrigators (in irrigation districts) in strategic planning for new infrastructure proposals. This includes such things as on-farm dams to store excess winter flows, as well as maximizing adoption of water-use efficiency technology across existing infrastructure and on-farm supplies.

Two key sub-programs within the Initiative that directly support irrigator engagement are:

- 1) The Irrigation Partnerships Program – funding to subsidise the cost of "public good" environmental studies for farm water developments; and
- 2) Farm Water Plans – subsidised advice to develop farm water plans to support targeted agricultural growth by ensuring that on-farm water development is feasible, optimal and environmentally sustainable.

There is a need to provide more certainty and longevity to the Irrigation Partnerships and Farm Water Plans programs. Both sub-programs are currently funded until 2008-09, which leaves a two-year gap of funding at the end of the 4-year program. This gap would be filled and investor confidence increased with the extension of the funding commitment to 2009-10.

Realising the desired 10-year growth targets also requires ongoing budget recognition for enhancing targeted farm water development initiatives. This includes:

- Funding for public-private sector joint ventures to investigate market-focused water development; and
- Financial incentives to encourage water development in target areas, including feasibility studies for new large-scale capital infrastructure works.

TFGA is seeking recognition from Government of capital investment that could be required in future if current feasibility projects for water development achieve promising results. For example year one of the initiative is supporting feasibility projects into:

- Transferring Poatina tailrace water to sub catchments along the western side of the Macquarie River; and
- The large-scale cooperative Meadstone Dam.

The time required for such new projects to go through the necessary R&D and then assessment phases reasonably exceeds a once-off 3 to 4 year program. To support appropriate and rigorous decision-making therefore requires an appropriate forecast rolling investment beyond 2009-10.

**Estimated Cost**

\$500,000 for 2009-10 and beyond.

**Link to Tasmania Together**

Goal 23: Ensure there is a balance between environmental protection and economic and social development.

Goal 24: Ensure our natural resources are managed in a sustainable way now and for future generations.

**References**

Implementation plan for the National Water Initiative Tasmania, Draft, June 2006  
Water Development Plan for Tasmania 2001

**Recommendation 6:**

That the Tasmanian Government provides additional funding of \$500,000 pa to the Forest Practices Authority to increase its capacity to cope as it assumes responsibility for regulation of non-forest vegetation clearance and conversion.

**Lead Department**

Department of Infrastructure, Energy and Resources

**Rationale**

Under legislation currently before the Legislative Council the role of the Forest Practices Authority (FPA) will expand to cover the regulation of clearance and conversion of threatened non-forest vegetation on private land.

This will be a significant expansion of FPA role, to deal with a new range of botanical situations and client communities, and this in turn will require a substantial expansion of FPA capacity in terms of both staff (numbers and range of skills) and infrastructure (transport, etc).

The precise quantum of increased capacity remains to be assessed, and will depend significantly on what efficiencies the FPA can secure in its operational systems, but it is estimated an increase of at least \$500,000 pa will be required.

**Estimated Cost**

\$500,000 per annum for four additional staff.

**Link to Tasmania Together**

Goal 21: Value, protect and conserve our natural diversity.

Goal 24: Ensure our natural resources are managed in a sustainable way now and for future generations.

**Recommendation 7:**

That the Tasmanian Government put a more effective system of weed control in place for Corridor Weed Management, relating to both main road and rail easements.

**Lead Department:**

Department of Infrastructure, Energy and Resources

**Rationale:**

Roadside vegetation management is necessary for safety and legal reasons, for road structure maintenance, for improved road appearance and to prevent weeds from spreading into neighbouring land that can threaten agricultural and environmental values. It has been estimated the farm sector could reduce the cost of weeds management by up to \$10 million per year with more effective control of weeds in road and rail corridors. There would also be a substantial reduction in frustration with the present system, which is failing to achieve the desired outcomes.

The Government has recently resumed responsibility for rail corridor management. It has always had responsibility for managing main road corridors. The task of weed control in both corridor systems can now be treated as one management problem for the first time in many years, with the opportunity to develop a more targeted and effective management strategy.

Weed management along main roads and railway lines has until recently been the responsibility of two different agencies – the Main Roads Authority and Tasrail. In both cases weed control has been subsidiary to other concerns. Road corridor maintenance has focused on the carriageway, and rail maintenance on fire hazard reduction. In both cases contractors have used techniques, which put a higher priority on minimising costs rather than achieving effective weed management. For example, both maintenance programs spray sections of corridor according to the calendar rather than the nature of the weed problem.

As stated in the ‘WeedPlan – Tasmania’s Weed Management Strategy’ the roles and responsibilities of Local and State Government need to be highlighted. The Government’s primary role and responsibility is to manage weed problems on its own land - in cooperation with other landowners.

The most recent development regarding Corridor Weed Management is a letter written to Minister for Infrastructure, Energy and Resources Jim Cox (attached) by TFGA detailing the problem and the course of action the Government needs to take.

**Link to Tasmania Together:**

Goal 22 Value, protect and maintain our natural diversity.

Goal 23: Ensure there is a balance between environmental protection and economic and social development.

Goal 24: Ensure our natural resources are managed in a sustainable way now and for future generations.

**Recommendation 8:**

That the Tasmanian Government implements a more extensive domestic cat control program and a feral cat eradication program for Tasmania in conjunction with the Fox Free Taskforce.

**Lead Department:**

Department of Primary Industries and Water

**Rationale:**

Australian research has shown that both domestic and feral cats continue to pose a significant risk to our native wildlife and livestock. Risks associated with cat problems can be separated into three categories:

- 1) Animal Health – spread of disease to sheep;
- 2) Human Health – spread of disease to humans; and
- 3) Predation of native vertebrates.

The Latrobe Council has been proactive and recently developed a Cat Management By-Law to improve the management of feral, stray and domestic cats in the municipal area. The TFGA is supportive of the proposed By-Law but believes there should be additions made including compulsory cat registration, a subsidised cat sterilization program and an education campaign for cat owners.

TFGA wants Government to introduce compulsory cat registration by pet owners as a means of protecting domestic cats and reducing the overall number of feral cats. The Tasmanian Conservation Trust has also stated that cat registration should be compulsory and included under the Dog Control Act.

TFGA recognises that a total feral cat eradication program by itself is not possible within current budget restraints. However, one way of maximising the use of existing resources could be to integrate feral cat eradication activities into the Fox Free Taskforce program.

The most recent development regarding compulsory cat registration, cat de-sexing and a feral cat eradication program is a letter written to Minister for Primary Industries and Water David Llewellyn (attached) detailing the problem and recommendations by TFGA.

**Estimated Cost:**

\$2,500,000

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|--|-------------|
| 1. Government funded sterilization program | \$2,000,000 |
| 2. Education campaign (12 months)          | \$ 500,000  |
| 3. Feral cat eradication program           | \$ (FFT)    |

**Link to Tasmania Together:**

Goal 22 Value, protect and maintain our natural diversity.

Goal 23: Ensure there is a balance between environmental protection and economic and social development.

Goal 24: Ensure our natural resources are managed in a sustainable way now and for future generations.

**References:**

*Cat Management by-law*, Latrobe Council (2005)

*Clarifying the status of cats*, Tasmanian Conservation Trust (2006)