

A submission to the IPART review of the
funding framework for
Local Land Services NSW

From

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October 2013

On reading the Report it becomes clear that the Tribunal is committed to the concept of a levy or tax based on the area of land held and is now searching for a plausible argument to justify that change.

One of the points raised is that new owners of small portions find it hard to understand the concept of Notional Carrying Capacity (NCC). This is true. New owners of small portions of land also find it hard to understand innumerable concepts that they have not had to deal with before and they are almost universally prepared and even excited at the prospect of mastering the challenges facing them.

The feigned inability to understand NCC is more an objection to the knowledge that having bought some land they are now being subjected to a tax of which they had been unaware and which has little similarity to any taxes levied on urban populations.

The argument that the basis of calculating LLS rates needs to be changed because small portion owners have no familiarity (not cannot understand) NCC is an argument that has no credibility.

As mentioned in the Report, the concept of a tax based on area was raised in the Bull report.

The idea was considered at the time but dismissed because in order for such an approach to have any pretence at fairness, each property would need to have the agricultural value of the land assessed in order to calculate what would be a fair and reasonable tax per hectare to impose.

This is exactly what the NCC does.

Reference is made to lighter land sometimes being harbour for vermin and therefore requiring more involvement from LLS rangers. This concept is far more complex than that statement allows. It is a biological fact that even vermin need nutrient in order to breed and grow, the thing about lighter land is that it is lacking in nutrient. This means that vermin cannot exist in light land at the same density as they would in land of a better carrying capacity. But the light land can become a haven for vermin, a day camp where they wait for the cover of darkness before venturing onto better land to feed. This situation is commonly seen where areas of light land have become the property of Land Speculators, misguided Nature Lovers and the NSW Parks and Wildlife Service. Where the vermin are left alone, they do become a problem on lighter land but this is not likely to be a problem where that land is either owned by a Battler who is trying to make a living on the light land or of a commercial farmer who owns both the light land and the better land which would become the feeding space for undisturbed vermin.

I do not recall seeing in the report any reference to interaction between the Native Vegetation Act 2003 and the proposed rating system for the LLS.

Because SEPP 46 was introduced in the dead of night without any consultation with stakeholders, most graziers found themselves with areas of pre-1990 regrowth which are now reclassified as old growth forest. Farmers do not spend their time standing around with mattock in hand waiting for a seedling to emerge. The economics require much regrowth to be allowed to accumulate until it becomes sensible to get machinery in to clear the paddock. This might be a 20 year cycle. Many had regrowth ready to be cleared at the time that SEPP 46 became the Native Vegetation Act 2003 and that regrowth has continued to grow and to increase in density. Farmers pay Shire rates on that regrowth covered area, it does not reduce the rateable value of the property because the Departments valuers argue that city people will pay more for scrub than for grazing land therefore the regrowth adds to the value of the place. They automatically control the weeds and vermin in that regrowth because failure to do so would

impact on the rest of their operations. Any imposition of a levy for LLS funding based on taxing on a per hectare basis, that area of regrowth protected by the Native Vegetation Act 2003 would be adding insult to injury. Having had the management rights over their land confiscated by the government in order to balance the carbon output of the urban populations and to then be taxed on the ownership of that same land would be totally unacceptable.

(I am using the word “regrowth” in the tradition sense of trees that have regrown since the land was cleared, not in terms of the erroneous definition given in the Native Vegetation Act 2003.)

Back in the 1970's the NSW Soil Conservation was active in the area around Jerangle offering to build free dams for farmers. This seemed like an offer too good to refuse and most took advantage of the offer. What the farmers did not know and were never told was that the structures built were in fact Silt Traps and the whole project was to prevent the siltation of the newly constructed Googong Dam near Queanbeyan. For many years after then the State Government claimed this expenditure as part of their largess towards farmers.

A similar situation exists regarding the Catchment Management Authorities (CMA's). These organisations exist to protect the inflow of water into the dams and reservoirs that serve the needs of the urban populations. Most of the joint operations I have seen between land owners and the CMA's have been between small acreage owners who commute to the city for work each day and for whom the CMA project is seen as a way of beautifying their house yard. The CMA's offer little of value to farmers and the introduction of a Natural Resource Management levy is nothing more than a blatant attempt to move the cost of providing clean water to the cities onto the farming community.

I would ask the Tribunal members to reconsider the recommendation that LLS rates be levied on a per hectare basis. The actual area of land has little bearing on the carrying capacity of a property and therefore the ability of the farmer to contribute to the costs of the LLS.

One property of 1,000 hectares might carry 5,000 sheep because it is based on the fertile and arable valley land but the adjoining property of the same area might carry only 1,000 sheep because it is based on the bare hills that over tens of thousands of years have built up the fertility of the valley as storms washed the soil downhill.

