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Timber Communities Australia Submission to:

REVISED DRAFT STATE POLICY ON THE PROTECTION OF AGRICULTURAL LAND 2007

Tasmanian members of Timber Communities Australia (TCA) believe that the current State policy to protect agricultural land introduced in 2000 has been able to meet its objectives, and agrees with the overall assessment of the 2006 review that the Policy does not require fundamental change but only needs clarification and more consistent implementation through local government planning schemes.

However the current draft policy and guideline notes appear to make significant (and in TCA's view unnecessary) changes to the policy and its implementation. As such this submission seeks to minimize those changes and support a policy with the objective is to protect both prime and non-prime agricultural land from conversion to non-agricultural use.

Some of these changes appear to be the result of subsequent events since the review, such as attempted changes to the Meander Valley and West Tamar planning schemes. Some changes appear to be in response to a concerted campaign against the establishment of tree farm plantations in a number of municipalities. TCA's branch network includes members that could be referred to as traditional "dirt farmers" and they are very annoyed by the anti tree farming campaign as they strongly believe that growing trees for wood fibre is no different to growing trees to produce walnuts or olives as all are legitimate agricultural land uses. They also strongly believe that it is the land owner that should be able to choose what commodity best suits his or her management goals for the property.

For any form of Government to determine what a land owner is to grow or not grow is a very disturbing move as what will be the response be if a future campaign is mounted against farmers right to grow, wine grapes or fruit trees just because someone dislikes the visual view of these important crops being covered the bird proof netting or a campaign against cereal crops just because of the dislike of regular use of heavy machinery, in creating dust each year with cultivating, sowing and harvesting?

Thus TCA seeks to support a policy that

- Protects agricultural land including soils classified prime and non prime for all legitimate productive agriculture land uses.
- Protects all agriculture activities including the retention of tree farming plantation forestry as a legitimate productive agriculture land use
- Provides balance between the need to maintain an effective sector wide productive agricultural land base as a whole, and the need to allow individual landowners the flexibility to manage their land
- Maintains landowners rights
- Seeks a consistent application and interpretation throughout the States local government planning schemes.

About Timber Communities Australia

TCA is a national grassroots community support group for people and communities who depend upon Australia's sustainable forest-based industries. TCA has 82 branches throughout Australia with 16 branches located within Tasmania. Members include families from both regional and small communities that are dependent upon the sustainable management of our natural resources and agricultural farm lands. This includes working native forests and tree farm plantations. Tree farm plantations provide long term community social and economic sustainability. Jobs provided are many and varied including seed collection, tree seedling nurseries, planting, crop growing management, pruning, harvesting and haulage, the many end uses via wood and timber processing, and the many thousands of families from the broader community that benefit from the growing of trees for wood fibre use, such as the local bakery through to the local doctor and local school teacher, all gaining direct or indirect benefit from a strong, sustainable and wealth-creating tree farming plantation sector. TCA holds to the philosophy of productive conservation.

TCA has branches located throughout the state and this is reflected in the surveyed employment directly generated by the forest sector. The Tasmanian local government areas with the highest proportion of their workforce employed in forestry are Derwent Valley (32% of the labour force works in forestry), Dorset (23%), Kentish (19%), Central Highlands (13%), Huon Valley (9%), Georgetown (9%), Glamorgan-Spring Bay (8.5%), and Circular Head (7.5%)¹.

TCA members support the sustainable development of all natural resources including agricultural land and water. They are first affected by planning decisions that impact on productive agricultural land.

¹ Schirmer J 2008 *Forestry, jobs and spending: forest industry employment and expenditure in Tasmania, 2005-06*, CRC Forestry Hobart

Tree farm plantations as a productive agricultural land use

The National Forest Policy Statement (NFPS) from 1992 set in train a process to increasingly reserve Australia's native forests to establish comprehensive, adequate and representative reserves and to develop hard wood tree farm plantations to provide timber products previously sourced from native forest areas. Prior to the NFPS, tree farm plantations were generally for soft wood and established on derelict farm land by Government.

Since the NFPS there has been an increasing establishment of hardwood plantations on private land, these plantations have brought significant social and economic benefit to regions. Such benefits include:

- Increased employment
- Increased investment
- Greater education and training opportunities
- Diversification of rural economies and individual enterprises
- help prevent rural population decline by providing alternative sources of long term employment

These benefits have been quantified by the Bureau of Rural Science in 2005 in its report *Socio-economic impacts of plantation forestry*.

Environmental benefits include:

- Shelterbelts for animals and crops
- The provision of multiple environmental benefits through addressing land degradation, salinity and soil erosion
- Generation of biomass
- Storage of carbon

In 1994 in a speech supporting the creation of Private Forests Tasmania the Tasmanian Greens political party acknowledged these benefits and concluded that:

"The benefits of establishing a really strong, competitive, viable private forest sector are not only ecological and environmental, but of course there are very real social benefits associated with it. The social benefit of private landowners- that is, ordinary farmers- participating in the forest industry in Tasmania would be great, because the crop diversification and harvest flexibility that would be offered by plantations could deliver significant gains in economic efficiency and robustness for many farms."²

The Protection of Agricultural Land policy protects these significant environmental, social and economic benefits by providing for tree farm plantations to be a productive agriculture land use and protects their

² Hansard, 2004 Peg Putt Speech, Private Forest Tasmania Bill, Wednesday 2 March 1994 - Part 3 - Pages 95 - 191

establishment on non prime agricultural soil. Land that is assessed as being class 1, 2, 2-3 or 3 is regarded as 'prime agricultural land' and according to figures published by Private Forests Tasmania (PFT) in 2006, less than 5,300 ha of tree farm plantation existed on these land classes and the majority of 150,000 ha of tree farm plantations on private land were on land classification 4 and beyond (non "prime agricultural land").

Yet despite this protection and established benefits there has been a concerted campaign against tree farm plantations that includes attempts to use this policy and local government planning schemes to oppose further tree farm plantation establishment.

This campaign has divided rural communities and caused much concern, it has placed at risk balanced sustainable development and further investment in the wood based products sector. Investment that has benefits at the national scale as well as the local community benefits described above. Such national benefit is seen in the Plantation 2020 Vision and in the regulation of investments that encourage afforestation schemes.

Such investments address national balance of trade problems as well as commitments under the Kyoto protocol. Yet these schemes (MIS) that encourage "city" money to invest in the "bush" have been criticized by opponents to tree farm plantation establishment. When these criticisms have been scrutinized and rejected by Federal Parliament Standing Committees and the National Government, the campaigners have attempted to use the Tasmanian PAL policy to affect the outcome of this national policy (MIS).

Residential Development and Productive Agricultural Land Use

Continued growth of rural communities is vital but poorly planned residential development can alienate productive agricultural land, an influx of former city dwellers into rural areas can bring new investment but can also bring a different range of values and aspirations. The draft policy recognizes the conflict by trying to identify nuisances for residents and trying not to "Fetter" or restrict normal agricultural activity. This real concern is despite Tasmania already having the Primary Industries Activities Protection Act 1995 that legislates that agricultural activity does not constitute a nuisance in certain circumstances.

Since the review of the PAL commenced there has been many media reports of such conflict and cases argued to planning authorities across the state.

Some local governments have attempted to create buffer zones to reduce conflict but this only further alienates productive agricultural land. TCA acknowledges that this is a very difficult matter that can be argued either way as carefully planned residential development can and does enhance the growth of "rural village" such as maintaining schools and health services. (TCA has witnessed positive win-win outcomes from rural residential development occurring within the rural village zone concept.)

The model planning scheme seeks to create a rural living zone to overcome ad hoc development of low density rural residential areas. But low density development spread throughout productive agricultural land and away from the established village often brings a direct clash of values thus presenting an argument that this should not be encouraged by future planning schemes but at the same time a landowner should be able to develop or sell what the owner determines as suitable land for residential purposes.

Conclusion:

The sustainable development of productive agricultural land is essential for our state's future, this development must be based upon the continued right of the land owner to choose what crop or commodity best suits the management plan for his or her property, whether that be wheat, trees for olives or trees for wood fibre.

The economic importance of tree farm plantations must now be recognised, after the very recent announcement that the new value adding approved pulp mill will be 100% supplied from tree farm plantations within 5 years.

The PAL policy must be maintained to also protect the significant environmental benefits of tree farm plantations including assisting the State and Federal government meeting its policy objectives on climate change. The United Nations, 2007 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Changes has acknowledged the important mitigation roles of tree farm plantations when it concluded that:

“In the long term, a sustainable forest management strategy aimed at maintaining or increasing forest carbon stocks, while producing an annual sustained yield of timber, fibre or energy from the forest, will generate the largest sustained mitigation benefit”³

To ensure that this continues the PAL policy must:

- Be expressed in a way which is clear and unambiguous to enable consistent interpretation by all planning authorities.
- needs to be consistently applied between Local Government Councils and planning schemes
- presents an orderly and consistent approach to regulating the subdivision of rural land based on modern practices rather than historical lot sizes,
- tree farm plantations must continue to be part of the definition of “agricultural use”

³ Nabuurs, G.J. et al, 2007: Forestry. In Climate Change 2007: Mitigation. Contribution of Working Group III to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [B. Metz, O.R. Davidson, P.R. Bosch, R. Dave, L.A. Meyer (eds)], Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA.

- should provide for farmers to build additional dwellings or other farm related infrastructure on farms, as required by those landowners and in locations best suited to maintain productive agricultural needs
- be consistent with the Primary Industry Activities Act 1995

Resources must also be allocated and a plan developed to inform the community upon any changes to the PAL policy by way of fact sheets, media advertising and releases. Training should also be provided to local government authorities to ensure the policy is applied as intended.

If this is undertaken there is the opportunity for the new Policy on the Protection of Agricultural Land to be a triple bottom line win for society, the economy and the environment.

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