

WESTERN DIVISION POLICY

Preamble

5 The Nature Conservation Council of NSW has had a long history of involvement in issues relating to land management in the Western Division of NSW. In the period prior to the establishment of the Joint Parliamentary Select Committee on the Western Division, the Executive was active in making a series of policy motions relating to the Division.

Council gave evidence on a range of land management issues to the Select Committee and, 10 when the findings were finally published, many of Council's recommendations were incorporated in the reports.

Following release of the Committee's findings, Council prepared a statement on the reports and presented evidence at a series of public meetings organised by the Government to discuss the reports. Subsequently, the Nature Conservation Council of NSW has been given 15 representation on the Western Lands Consultative Council. It has actively pursued a number of policy objectives.

The Nature Conservation Council was hopeful that the recommendations put forward by the Western Division Parliamentary Select Committee Inquiry would lead to significant improvements, particularly in regard to the conservation of representative vegetation alliances 20 and land systems.

Regretfully, because of unsuitable land uses such as the continued ad hoc clearing of native vegetation for cropping in the eastern region, forestry activities adjoining the Murray River, and pastoralism in vulnerable areas, many plant communities and wildlife habitats are at increasing risk.

25 This policy was adopted by the Executive of the Nature Conservation Council of NSW on August 12, 1988 and subsequently endorsed at the 1988 Annual Conference.

Since endorsement at the 1988 Annual Conference, this

Policy has received comment from the Soil Conservation

Service of NSW. As a result, some minor amendments will be

30 considered by the Executive in the near future.

1. Land Tenure

Term Leasehold is the preferred land tenure for western lands not occupied by the Crown, Council is opposed to the freeholding of leasehold lands.

2. Loss of Native Vegetation

35 2.1 In principle Council is opposed to the clearing and cultivation of any native vegetation that:

- i) is within the Murray Geological Basin
- ii) is within 40km of the Murray River
- iii) is the habitat of rare or threatened species
- 40 iv) comprises plant alliances or land systems that are not adequately reserved
- v) is a movement corridor for fauna linking fragmented habitat
- vi) is on marginal arid lands (<200mm AAR or erodible soil types)
- vii) occurs on uncultivated lake beds
- viii) within 300m of rivers, streambanks and annabanches.

45 2.2 Council is opposed to any further clearing of native vegetation until such time as:

- i) the necessary vegetation and land system analyses have been completed by the NSW Government, particularly for those areas subject to clearing and cultivation applications, tourism or other significant development activities;
- ii) regional environmental studies and plans have been carried out; and
- 50 iii) a comprehensive land use planning policy, embracing the whole of the Western Division is released by the NSW Premier. This should have objectives for the management of the Western Leasehold Lands as recommended by the Joint Parliamentary Select Committee.

2.3 Inedible Woody Plants

55 2.3.1 Council acknowledges that woody shrub invasion and Coolibah-Blackbox regrowth incurs higher productivity costs and lower returns and that it is a serious problem that may force lessees off the land if not controlled. Council, therefore, supports the principle of woody shrub and CoolibahBlackbox control provided that each affected species is well conserved in the parks and reserves system, that cumulative threats to threatened species
60 habitat is avoided and that the general habitat amenity of the region is conserved.

2.3.2 In addition, the adverse impact of various control measures (e.g. grazing, repeated burning, use of 'Velpar', blade ploughing, etc.) on soils and other plant species needs to be researched and monitored to lessen the impact.

65 2.3.3 The practice of blitz grazing by goats of stands of woody shrubs needs research and monitoring to control the impact on the environment.

2.3.4 Prior to woody shrub removal by a lessee the advice of the Soil Conservation Service and Western Lands Commission should be sought, preferably by field inspection.

2.4 Prescribed Burning

2.4.1 In general, Council is opposed to the prescribed burning of mallee.

70 2.4.2 Occasional wildfire is not alien to semi-arid/arid NSW, however repeated burning of woody shrubs or mallee over two or three years should be regarded as a clearing operation and consequently require an Environmental Impact Statement.

2.4.3 The Western Lands Commission should require all mallee burning operations for areas burnt in the last fifteen years to be subject to an EIS carried out by suitably qualified persons.

75 2.5 Economics

2.5.1 Any proposal by a lessee to clear native vegetation for pastoral or horticultural development should be assessed against all costs of the operation, economic as well as environmental.

3. Stocking Rates

80 It should be recognised that stocking below maximum carrying capacity (minimum risk stocking) helps reduce operation costs, soil degradation and depletion of native plant species that are failing to regenerate under persistent stock grazing.

4. Assistance to Lessees

85 4.1 Given the relatively small size of some properties, the potential Dry Sheep Equivalent carrying capacity is often too low to sustain a reasonable income and hence lessees are more likely to be financially pressured to overstock their paddocks. Accordingly, the government should provide special assistance to enable lessees of grazing lands to vacate for the purposes of national parks, nature reserves, Aboriginal lands, or amalgamation with adjoining properties.

90 4.2 In addition, the government should continue to financially assist lessees to destock country that is undergoing native pasture regeneration.

4.3 Landholders should receive government concessions, incentives and free extension services to assist their efforts to control noxious weeds and exotic pest animals such as rabbits, feral goats and feral pigs.

95 **5. Rabbit Control**

5.1 Research should be continued to enhance the impact of the myxoma virus

5.2 Native predators should be encouraged where control is needed.

5.3 Ripping, ploughing or exploding of burrows should minimise effects on vegetation that consists of rarer plant species, particularly those restricted to soils suitable for rabbit warrens.

5.4 Poisoning campaigns, if carried out, should involve frequent collection of rabbit carcasses and remaining baits so as to avoid secondary poisoning to native wildlife and feral animals that play an important role in keeping rabbit numbers down.

6. National Parks, Nature Reserves and Wildlife Refuges

105 6.1 The system of national parks, nature reserves and wildlife refuges must be expanded to ensure the adequate protection of the habitat of all endangered species, threatened plant communities and non-represented land systems. For example, major stands of River Red Gum and the habitat of the Regent Parrot and Superb Parrot are in urgent need of reservation. In addition, the system should contain the remaining wilderness areas, wild and scenic rivers and other appropriate lands for public recreation.

6.2 Wildlife refuges should be legally dedicated in perpetuity, with concomitant reduced rentals, to assist with the protection of areas under threat. The new system of voluntary conservation agreements should therefore be developed and implemented.

115 6.3 At least 5% of the Western Division should be reserved by 1990 for the purposes outlined in 4.1.

6.4 A public awareness programme should be implemented to increase lessees awareness of the nature conservation value of withdrawing areas from clearing, cultivation and grazing pressure. In addition, the procedure for park or reserve creation must be communicated.

120 6.5 Given its commitment to the National Conservation Strategy, which promotes the reservation of representative areas, funding for the purchase of western land leases should be sought from the Commonwealth Government.

6.6 Sufficient funding should be made available to facilitate effective management of NPWS areas. This should include the implementation of management plans that detail co-operative programmes with neighbours for practices such as feral animal control.

- 125 6.7 Basic inventory work and management orientated research in the Western Division should receive higher priority within NPWS.

7 Water Resources

- 7.1 Community involvement in water policy formulation is essential, particularly where this relates to water sharing decisions.
- 130 7.2 Wildlife, fish and other instream needs are legitimate competing uses for water and as such environmental water requirements should be regarded as an integral rather than residual part of water agency decision making.
- 7.3 Water management plans, similar to the Macquarie Marshes Plan, should be prepared for all major inland wetland systems.
- 135 7.4 Irrigation infrastructure should be upgraded so as to make more efficient use of water and greater use and treatment of wastewater.
- 7.5 The concept of rivers and associated wetlands as "drains" for saline discharges from salinity control works is strongly rejected.
- 7.6 All evaporation basin proposals should require an Environmental Impact Statement and
140 the disposal of saline groundwaters from existing pumpouts should be monitored for adverse impacts on surrounding land.
- 7.7 All land managers should recognise that water degradation problems are often closely related to loss of vegetation and the incorrect use of farm chemicals.

8. Planning

- 145 8.1 The NPWS, Soil Conservation Service, Crown Lands, NSW Aboriginal Land Council, Western Lands Commission, Forestry Commission, National Herbarium of NSW, the Australian Museum and the Department of Planning (in consultation with the Murray Darling Ministerial Council and CSIRO) should collaborate to develop a biophysical data base to facilitate land use and as a matter of urgency land management decision making.
- 150 8.2 The Western Lands Commission should acknowledge the need to manage the Division for ecological values as well as pastoral productivity.
- 8.3 The NSW Tourism Commission should consider how environmentally sensitive tourism might be used to promote socio-economic diversification in the Western Division without prejudice to its natural values.

- 155 8.4 The provisions of the NSW Environmental Planning and assessment Act 1979 should be properly applied to all development activities in the Western Division that are likely to have a significant or cumulative effect on the natural environment. Penalties for breaches of covenants, licenses or any other development controls must be strictly enforced.
- 160 8.5 The Catchment Area Protection Board should continue mapping "environmentally sensitive" Protected Land in the Division and implement its protection powers under the Soil Conservation Act 1987 (amended).
- 165 8.6 Where appropriate, Statutory Authorities and local government councils should cooperate with the Western Lands Commission by supplying a review of environmental factors for any construction proposal on land under Western Lands Commission administration.