
PNF Comments

1 message

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Regarding the request for comments on the new PNF, the following are my comments.

Comments on PNF Terms of Reference

Congratulations on coming to grips with the process of developing a modern and hopefully very effective PNF process for NSW. And also thanks for this opportunity to make some comments. In general, I find the document written in a very bureaucratic style. Is there a gentler way to present it so that it comes over as a more friendly and cooperative approach to set up an exciting new venture for Government and the cooperating landholders? The Government will need landholders to wholeheartedly assist and support this process, so it would be beneficial if an alternative to standard public service wording is found and used.

Background

It is good to use information on the total area of PNF in NSW and the figures given will convey to landholders why it is important that those with large enough and/or good quality forest, consider their forests as a vital 'part' of the total forest estate and that they are now invited to assist in this very important role. Perhaps some historical data on the contribution of private and public forest to the supply of timber for the state over the last 50 years could help in setting the scene. In addition to that, the volume and value of timber imports would also be of interest to PNF landholders. Comments on the origin of that timber would also be pertinent. Has any come from interstate or does it all originate overseas? This may seem to be unnecessary but to have the PNF landholders totally on side they need to be in full possession of relevant background information. I seem to recall that FAO had a publication on tropical and subtropical countries that were actively involved in exporting timber in the 1980s. I think about 20 were listed but I believe that by the year 2000, that number had dropped to less than 10 countries. I also understand that as Forest Certification has become more important, third world countries have been forced to adopt that requirement to ensure they have markets for their forest products. It is likely that the volume of timber available to Australia from natural forest stands overseas is likely to drop significantly and could be supplemented by those countries with active plantation programs and where there is surplus product to local requirements. However, we should not depend on this import continuing and it is likely that price of imported timber will increase. We should be able to basically supply our own requirements.

Further suggestions

If Government and landholders can be viewed as cooperative partners in developing a system of PNF management so that the supply of the full range of forest products are available in effect *in perpetuity*, then a slightly different approach should be developed. That approach should be careful using such terms as 'regulate' or 'regulating' and 'need for approval' and those sentiments should be couched in a more cooperative and 'partnership' manner. The suggestion in section (b) includes 'without the need for approval' indicating a level of acceptance by Government that the landholders have the ability and capacity to be able to prepare and develop forest management practices that can operate based on the landholders also having a desire to demonstrate and practice 'sustainable forest management'.

With regard to the four pillars for ESM, it would seem to be beneficial to have a supplementary paper (perhaps as an appendix) on the Government plans on how to balance 'supply and demand'. Perhaps Government can provide information on how that process will be established and then monitored. What is the current demand in the state and where does the supply come from? Does it come from other states or is it largely imported from overseas? The pillar on 'community understanding and confidence' is absolutely vital for the acceptance and support for the new PNF. How will that be introduced to the landholders and what opportunities will they have to discuss how impacts will be measured and evaluated on their properties? It is

likely that landholders will be more accepting than some community groups and it will be necessary for Government to establish good communications also with key environmental organizations as there will be others that are likely to be very critical of any move to allow farmers to decide how to manage 'their' forest and what can be harvested.

All of these considerations raise the need for good information on forest management strategies to be readily available to landholders. Some information can be supplied in brochures but other information will need to be passed on in the field at field days presented by trainers accepted by the landholders. Some landholders will be innovative and advanced in their acceptance of PNF and should be encouraged to take part in field days and progressively lead discussions. There is suspicion within the farming community regarding Government officers, so some trainers will need to be recruited from graduate foresters or from Universities or TAFEs. Has the Government considered these matters as when landholders find out what is in store for them, they will need to access data, methodology and qualified people. This information needs to be presented to landholders as an interesting and new approach for farmers to totally manage the timber on their land bearing in mind they do have other commitments. It could be interesting for Government to set up actual model farms illustrating the performance of this new phase of PNF. Data should be available on such topics as the area of forest types taken into 'good' management, growth rates within the various vegetation types, and timber volume estimates within the 'managed' forests compared with unmanaged forests. Such 'Demonstration Farms' would assist in the understanding and extension of the PNF process and would be valuable in each of the major timber production zones. Other assessments of the impacts on the biodiversity of the farmer's land also need to be taken using sound sampling and easily applied methods. This data will be of use to all landholders moving into the new PNF procedures.

A Challenge for both Government and Landholders

A major problem facing the new Government/Landholder co-operative is how to address the impact of many years of 'high grading' in eucalypt forests. The practice has been widespread and the impact has been to progressively reduce the quality of logs with each successive harvest and also to progressively reduce site productivity. Landholders who have stock are fully aware of the need to progressively improve the genetic make up of their herd or flock so as to increase returns with their enhanced livestock production. When reminded that genetics covers all life forms they will realize that they do have within their capacity a means of improving the productivity of their 'high graded' forests through genetic means. They need to work with Government to develop strategies for each of their quality sites to progressively improve log quality as well as total production. Increasing standing \$ value increments of their trees will become obvious with time but should be supported by regular measurements. A range of strategies can be envisaged from careful gentle thinning, through heavier thinning with enrichment planting to total stand removal in small blocks and planting with high quality seedling stock. If 'high graded' stands are left with no additional inputs, they will not be able to grow at the rate or with the original quality of the native stand and production will be progressively down-graded with each successive harvest. Improvements will take time but if this problem is not addressed in a vigorous way, the site potential will not be achieved and potential yields for the state not reach their full potential. Could landholders improving their forest using this approach attract Carbon Credits from Government as a reward for improving the potential of their farm to contribute to the overall state production potential.

Landholders will need to have short courses on PNF silviculture that could be developed by Universities and TAFEs. It is likely that more detailed courses will be needed for trainers to ensure that their knowledge is adequate for the task of passing on skills and methodologies to landholders. Key components of such courses should be the most important parts of management (stand management through thinning and pruning, fire, pests and diseases) and what and how to select for thinning in a stand. Landholders with their knowledge of stock management and sustainable farm management will move into tree thinning with what can be expected to be the right background to do a good job for themselves, their farm and the state.

I congratulate the Government on this move into a new PNF and wish the Government and the landholders every success. It is very important that it does work so that the timber requirements of the state can be met into the future.

David Cameron