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PNF Code penalises farmers

The NSW Farmers' Association says that it is very concerned regarding the impact of the recent decision by the NSW Government on Private Native Forestry.

NSW Farmers' Association Conservation and Resource Management Committee Chair Louise Burge says the Private Native Forestry code (PNF) appears to ignore expert forestry advice about how to grow and maintain healthy productive forests.

"Prescriptions set in Sydney will prevent local management decisions thus leading to forest decline," Mrs Burge said.

"There are areas where farmers have traditionally practised single tree harvesting, in many cases for generations on the same property, yet these practises which have led to such valuable forests, now face a new regime of management based upon locking them up and leaving them.

Mrs Burge says this will inevitably lead to these areas being vulnerable to fire and weeds, and private forest owners who have managed and cared for their forests will find they are penalised.

"There is plenty of evidence that lack of on ground management, as evidenced in the public reserves system, leads to wildfires and weeds. Farmers want to ensure that their private forest maintain their current high quality," Mrs Burge said.

Following community anger over the publicly exhibited draft PNF Code in August 2006, the Government referred further work on the Code to be undertaken by the Natural Resources Advisory Council (NRAC) to develop a transitional Code prior to the development of new legislation for private forests in two years time.

However, NRAC was unable to complete its work due to time constraints and other issues, and instead the latest Code has been developed by Government Departments.

"The codes are now available on the DECC website, however additional regulations that further prescribe conditions, are yet to be made publicly available by the Department. We are aware however, farmland nominated for forestry activities, have lost their basic right to construct infrastructure such as dams, fences, stockyards under the Native Vegetation Act," Mrs Burge said.

"To undertake these simple routine activities will now require consent if conducting forestry operations. This shows a complete lack of understanding that most of these forest areas are multi use, where traditional grazing occurs in conjunction with growing trees.

"If a sensible practical Code was developed, conservation and productions outcomes could be achieved in balance as has occurred historically with no cost to the taxpayer or local economies. However, green politics dictates that sets of prescriptions must be imposed and if private land has vulnerable or threatened species, then that farmer is penalised for doing the right thing," Mrs Burge concluded.

Contact: Ellen McNamara (Media Officer) 0429 990 218