

### **Issue**

Private native forestry has been an exempt activity under the Native Vegetation Act. This exemption expired on 1 August 2007 with the gazettal of the Private Native Forestry Regulation and four transitional codes (Redgum, Cypress, North Coast, and South Coast).

Therefore all forestry operations on private property in NSW must now be covered by a Private Native Forestry Property Vegetation Plan.

### **Background**

The codes are a transitional arrangement pending development of a Private Native Forestry Act, which the Government has stated will occur within the next two years.

Copies of the codes and details about the timeframe for commencement of the new arrangements are available at: [www.environment.nsw.gov.au/pnf/index.htm](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/pnf/index.htm)

The codes set new criteria for harvesting, including changed conditions for riparian, old growth, rainforest and threatened species.

The Government has stated that the codes will result in a 20% net loss of yield across the State. Impacts, however, will vary from property to property depending on the proportion of forest that is riparian, old growth as well as other factors. In heavily dissected country, or where farmers have practiced sustainable silviculture (thus upgrading the environmental value of the forest) some farmers could lose a majority of their resource.

### **Socio-economic impacts**

The Government has refused to undertake a socio-economic impact study of the codes. This is contrary to the recommendations of the Natural Resources Advisory Council which, prior to the State election in March 2007, allocated \$460,000 from its budget to fund the study. The likely explanation for this refusal is that the study is certain to reveal a much greater than 20% loss of yield for many landholders and a high compensation bill for government

As a conservative rough estimate, the value of timber lost from the largest 200 PNF properties on the eastern fall of NSW would be in the order of \$20 million every ten years (on the basis of a sustainable harvest of today's resource). Including other NSW regions and smaller PNF operators, could double this loss.

The compensation package announced by the Government in relation to the Codes is for timber mills and timber workers only (a one-off, \$27 million package).

The Government has stated, however, that landholders will be able to access money from the existing native vegetation sustainable farming fund (\$12 million) to help them to switch to other forms of production. This funding, however, is clearly negligible in comparison to the actual loss experienced by landholders.

### **Protecting environmental values**

Private forests provide valuable habitat, particularly in coastal NSW. Elements within the environmental lobby have therefore been determined to ensure that the transitional codes and any subsequent legislation minimise the ability to landholders to harvest timber. There are strong scientific arguments, however, that sustainable forestry can enhance biodiversity and that timber production and conservation can coexist. Selective harvest techniques ensure that the forest is sustained in peak condition.

The Association will continue to seek a flexible regulatory model that relies on sustainable production techniques rather than exclusion zones to achieve good environmental outcomes.

### **Routine Agricultural Management Activities**

A further issue of concern is the restriction of Routine Agricultural Management Activities ('RAMAs') within Private Native Forestry ('PNF') areas to the maintenance of fences and other basic infrastructure. Farmers who sign a PNF PVP will give up their right to clear for new infrastructure without approval on the land covered by the PVP. The Association has opposed this measure as it may deter smaller PNF operators from continuing in the PNF industry. The Government has stated, however, that there will be no impediment to farmers gaining approvals for genuine RAMA activities, should this be in future required within a PNF zone.

### **Current situation**

The Association has raised the above concerns with Government and will continue to seek that a socio economic impact study is undertaken.

The Association will continue to work with the agencies and forest industry bodies to achieve revisions to the transitional codes and to develop a practical sustainable Private Forestry Act.