



Dharriwaa ("common meeting place") Elders Group

direct phone: 02 6828 2619 direct email: dharriwaa@ceinternet.com.au

a program of the Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service Co-operative Ltd NSW

ABN: 78 014 990 451, 37 Pitt St (P.O Box 396), Walgett NSW 2832

Phone: (02) 6828 1611, 6828 1798 Fax: (02) 68281201

Email: walgettams@bigpond.com

Stewart Webster
A/ Program Leader Industry Policy
Economic Services Unit
NSW Agriculture
Locked Bag 21
Orange NSW 2800
Ph: 02 6391 3453
Fx: 02 6391 3650

30 June 2004

Re: Review of the Rural Lands Protection Act 1998

Thank you for the opportunity to make a late submission to your review. Unfortunately we had no knowledge of the review until a letter was seen in the Koori Mail. The NSW Dept of Agriculture should improve the promotion of its activities to Aboriginal communities.

The Dharriwaa Elders Group (DEG) takes a leading interest in the protection of Aboriginal cultural heritage in the Walgett region. This includes an interest in the preservation of native vegetation, native animals and where they live. Crown land reserves including the travelling stock routes and watering places are now the main places where native vegetation remains, and evidence of Aboriginal sacred and everyday lives, are preserved. Around our area, bora grounds, burials sites and sites where people lived in traditional times are found on these lands.

We are conducting a project to record sites that are important to us, and hope to develop and attract the resources to be able to protect and maintain them. We believe that Aboriginal cultural heritage and natural resources are public goods which benefit the spiritual, emotional, and social well-being of Aboriginal people and potentially all Australians. Economic benefits from eco tourism and Aboriginal cultural tourism will be a future benefit from preserving and maintaining these places for the public good.

The DEG is also concerned about the lack of work opportunities for Aboriginal people in our country towns due to the shortage of unskilled jobs, lack of skills training and industrial change in agriculture in NSW.

Your review presents an opportunity for Aboriginal communities. The Rural Lands Protection Boards (RLPBs) have never had the resources to take on the custodial responsibilities for Aboriginal cultural heritage on the lands they are responsible for. Most RLPBs would have no knowledge of the wealth of cultural heritage under their

feet. Aboriginal people should have a greater role in the management of these crown lands.

A new joint management venture between the Aboriginal Land Councils and Rural Lands Protection Boards could be self-supporting, funded by the tourism industry and landholders benefiting from the stock routes and other places.

Recommendations

1. That the spiritual, emotional, economic and social well-being of Aboriginal people is a benefit of Aboriginal cultural heritage and natural resources and should be recognised in objectives of the Act, and preserved and managed by the Act for future generations of all Australians
2. The NSW travelling stock routes and other crown land reserves currently controlled by the RLPBs should be under the joint control of local Aboriginal land councils and the RLPBs.
3. Aboriginal land councils and the RLPBs must be resourced to manage this responsibility better than they have been managed in the past.
4. The Rural Lands Protection Act should not jeopardise the management of Aboriginal cultural heritage and potential claims under the NSW Land Rights Act
5. Revenue to cover the costs involved in the management of NSW travelling stock routes and other crown land reserves should be raised from those who benefit directly from their use. Landholders adjacent to the reserves, landholders whose stock use the reserves and tourism operators who will benefit from the protection of these areas in the future should contribute to the management costs of these lands. A tax¹ could be introduced to assist this process.

yours truly

George Rose OAM
for and on behalf of the Dharriwaa Elders Group

¹ e.g. a “bed tax” from all motel, hotel, caravan park visitors, a tourists’ “arrival tax” collected at regional NSW airports, and other revenue raising measures should be investigated.