

NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

1. Background

At previous Forum meetings briefing notes were tabled on natural resources management (NRM). The notes outlined the State Government's progress in developing and implementing a policy on Natural Resource Management which seeks to integrate NRM in a number of key areas:

- institutional and structural arrangements and relationships;
- funding mechanisms;
- planning and decision-making processes; and
- regional boundaries.

A diverse range of issues and concerns have been raised by Local Government. To date, the Forum's focus has been on the collection of the proposed NRM levy and the State Government proposal that this be undertaken by councils.

At its July meeting, the Forum was advised of a joint working group comprising representatives of DWLBC, OLG and the LGA which had been formed to provide information to assist both State and Local Government in determining what would be the most appropriate sphere of government to collect the proposed NRM levy.

In July 2003, the Minister for Environment and Conservation released the Consultation Draft NRM Bill 2003 for public comment. Due to negotiations between the State and Local Government regarding the NRM levy collection not being completed, the provisions in the draft Bill relating to the determination and method of collection of the NRM levy were not fully detailed.

2. Recent Developments

In August 2003, the working group finalised the investigations and reported its findings to the Minister for Environment and Conservation, the Minister for Local Government and the President, Local Government Association.

This work identified that there was very little difference between the estimated NRM levy collection costs of State (Revenue SA) and Local Government and confirmed that a separate NRM levy notice would have very significant cost implications.

In responding to the draft Bill, the LGA has indicated two over-arching areas of concern

- the apparent excessive level of centralized power, control and responsibility in relation to the NRM process
- the lack of a framework for the effective involvement and integration of Local Government activities and initiatives with those envisaged to be undertaken by the Commonwealth and State Agencies through the various proposed structures.

The LGA submission identified a significant number of areas of concern and proposed constructive suggestions to address these.

In recent correspondence to the President of the LGA, the Minister for Environment and Conservation has acknowledged the main concerns raised and given (under option 2)¹ an undertaking that the Government will work with the LGA so that the NRM Bill has its formal endorsement prior to being introduced into Parliament. The Minister has also indicated that the LGA will be consulted on the preparation of regulations, and a process will be developed for the consideration of relevant amendments to the Bill during the Parliamentary debate.

The newly appointed/elected LGA State Executive Committee discussed the letter from the Minister when it met on 3 October 2003. Option 2 was favoured in preference to option 1.

It is intended that further discussions and negotiations be undertaken at the Chief Executive and Minister/ President level to enable the LGA to then formally consult with councils.

3. Recommendation

It is recommended that the Forum:

- 1. Determine that natural resource management remain on the Forum agenda given the ongoing negotiations between State and Local Government on the draft Natural Resources Management Bill 2003.**
- 2. Receive a verbal update at the meeting on the 'state of play' and determine what role, if any, it seeks to play in order to assist the negotiation process.**

¹ The Minister has given the LGA two options in relation to the determination and collection of the proposed NRM levy. Optional 1 continues for a limited period the current animal and plant control contributions and the continued collection of the catchment water management levy by councils. Option 2 proposes that Local Government collects the land based NRM levy.