

REVIEW OF THE *PASTORAL LAND ACT 1992*

Key Issues Paper

**Submission by
Biodiversity Conservation Division
Conservation and Natural Resources, DIPE**

February 2005

The Key Issues Paper describes a total of 43 issues that were raised in initial submissions to the review of the PLA. The range of issues raised emphasise that the review of the Act is timely and needs to be comprehensive in scope. We note that many of the issues, and the majority of submissions, relate to environmental management on pastoral lands, and there is clearly an expectation that the revised Act will provide a strong framework for ensuring that uses of pastoral land are ecologically sustainable.

The Biodiversity Conservation Division prepared a detailed submission in response to the initial discussion paper and the substance of that submission is summarised in the Key Issues paper. Many of the issues we addressed were also raised, and with broadly similar suggestions for amendments, by other respondents. We do not therefore consider it necessary to submit a further detailed response to the Key Issues paper.

However, we do briefly reiterate some of the major points in our submission here, particularly those that we think would be fruitfully addressed by the working groups foreshadowed in the Key Issues paper (p2).

1. Biodiversity conservation, duty of care and non-pastoral use

It is important that the revised PLA explicitly recognises the major contribution that pastoral lands make to conservation of the Northern Territory's biodiversity. Such recognition should include:

- including "ecologically sustainable management" of pastoral lands in the objects of the Act;
- establishing the duty of care of pastoral land holders to extend to maintaining the biodiversity values of the land, particularly the protection of areas of high conservation significance;
- a mechanism for formally identifying all areas of high conservation value on pastoral leases;
- allowing the management of part, or all, of a pastoral lease primarily for the purposes of biodiversity conservation.

2. *Developments on pastoral leases, including clearing and introduced pastures*

The revised PLA needs to establish more rigorous processes to ensure that various developments on pastoral leases are not environmentally damaging. Such developments would include:

- clearing of native vegetation;
- introduction of exotic pasture species;
- major waterpoint development (including building of dams, and bunds for ponding);
- significant intensification of pastoral use;
- major diversification of land use.

In at least some cases, it would be appropriate that the approval processes applying to pastoral lands be brought into line with those for other tenures in the NT. There were a variety of suggested assessment mechanisms in the initial submissions (including ours) and the most appropriate mechanisms, taking into account the operation of the *Planning Act* and *Environment Assessment Act*, would be best determined within a working group.

We are particularly concerned that there is currently no effective mechanism to regulate the use of introduced pasture species on pastoral lands, and stress that this must be explicitly addressed in the revised PLA.

3. *Environmental Management Plans for pastoral properties*

We regard the development and application of detailed property-scale management plans as an essential component of sustainable pastoral management. Furthermore, many of the environmental management issues relevant to pastoral lands could be addressed through the framework of a property Environmental Management Plan. We recommend (and a number of other submissions made similar suggestions) that the revised PLA require that EMPs be developed for all pastoral leases, and are used as the basis for assessing the environmental performance of property management.

We provided details of the appropriate content of such EMPs in our initial submission, but suggest that the process for developing and accrediting these plans be the subject of a working group.

4. *Incentives for good environmental management and biodiversity conservation*

We believe that a major factor currently limiting the implementation of ecologically sustainable management on pastoral lands is the lack of concrete incentives for landholders. We therefore recommend that the revised PLA contains provision for appropriate incentive or “stewardship” schemes. It would be useful for the review to commission an analysis of the range of incentive models currently operating in other jurisdictions, in order to assist a working group to develop a model suitable for application in the NT.

5. Monitoring

The revised PLA needs to include a more stringent framework for monitoring the condition of NT pastoral lands, including a broader range of environmental indicators and taking into account the resource condition targets established under the NT INRM Plan.

6. Composition and function of the Pastoral Lands Board

The review of the PLA needs to carefully examine the responsibilities and composition of the PLB. Our submission suggested that some responsibilities (such as the assessment of land clearing and other major developments) are best removed from the PLB, but that other functions are expanded or created (such as oversight of the development of property Environmental Management Plans). We believe that the current composition of the PLB would be inadequate to deal with its changing roles, and that the membership should be increased, with a broader range of expertise represented.

We look forward to the opportunity of elaborating on these issues and providing further input to the Review through the proposed working groups.