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TCT Submission - 2009-2010 State Budget Community Consultation

The Tasmanian Conservation Trust (TCT) is pleased to be invited to make a submission to the process of developing the 2009-2010 State Budget. We have prepared the submission in accordance with your Department's September 2008 *Community Consultation Submission Guidelines: Peak Community Organisations*.

1. Executive Summary

1.1. Establishment of a Parks and Reserves Authority

Establish the Parks and Wildlife Service as an independent statutory authority with a mandate to maintain the Parks and Reserves System in Tasmania as a world-class natural, recreational and economic asset and increase the budgeted expenditure by \$25.5 million in year one and \$21.5 million each year thereafter to meet reserve management and staff training and recruitment needs (as well as the provision of visitor services), and thus enable it to finally achieve its Tasmania Together targets.

1.2. Expansion of DPIW's Capacity in the key areas of Cat Control, Biosecurity and Private Land Conservation

- *Implementation of Proposed Cat Management Strategy and Legislation:*
In anticipation of the completion of the State Government's *Cat Management in Tasmania* Strategy and the passage of recommended cat control legislation by the middle of 2009, significant additional resources are required by both the DPIW and RSPCA to implement the ground-breaking and popular measures for control of cats (\$2.3m additional in year one, \$1.1m per year additional for three years).
- *Expansion of Biosecurity Programs:*
Improve the Department of Primary Industries and Water's (DPIW) capacity to implement the existing weed, pest and disease plans and bolster the border security programs to prevent further introduction or establishment of damaging organisms into Tasmania (\$2.5m additional per year for four years).

- *Improve the State's capacity for preventative action in relation to weeds:*
Improve the DPIW's capacity to support landowners, community groups and councils to manage weeds by expanding the Weed Management Branch's capacity to facilitate collaborative programs to prevent weed establishment and spread (\$1.0m additional in year one, \$0.5m per year additional for three years).
- *Threatened Species on Private Land:*
Expand DPIW's capacity to support land owners and community groups to protect and manage threatened species on their land (\$0.2m additional per year for four years).

2. Prioritisation of Recommendations

The recommendations listed in the summary and below are all in priority order.

3. Organisations Role and Functions

The Tasmanian Conservation Trust was formed in 1968 and has for many years performed the role of Tasmania's peak conservation organisation. The TCT has a broad range of individuals, groups and businesses within its membership and is governed by a Council elected from the membership. The TCT is a non-political organisation and is committed to working with government, industry, other non-government organisations and the community to achieve genuine, on-ground conservation outcomes whenever and wherever possible.

The TCT is Tasmania's only state-wide conservation organisation with a mandate to work on the full range of environmental issues, both urban and rural, terrestrial and marine. It operates in a range of ways, aiming to influence policy at all levels of government but also participating in strategically important hands-on projects as well. Central to its philosophy is that it formally engages with government and industry on conservation issues, participates in management processes and provides independent and informed advice.

Given its limited level of resources, the TCT operates mainly in response to the initiatives of others, dealing with issues as and when they arise – such as myriad applications for planning approvals, development of management plans for parks and reserves, dealing with complaints about 1080 poisoning of wildlife. The staff are constantly being asked for advice and information by community groups and individuals on these and many other issues. A significant part of the workload involves representing conservation interests on a large number of committees established by various government agencies and, to a lesser extent, councils, NRM Groups and community groups.

Over many years the TCT has administered the finances and project officers for numerous short-term but strategically important on-ground projects with some current examples being the Community Action for Derwent Penguins project funded by the Envirofund project, the Swift Parrot Nest Identification Project funded by the Threatened Species Network Grants and the Derwent Community Wetlands Project funded by the Envirofund. Some of these projects are TCT initiatives but we also provide administrative support for other groups' projects.

Priorities as set out in the TCT's Strategic Plan for 2007-2009 are:

- Protection of biodiversity through improved management of native vegetation, ending or mitigating sustainable impacts on native animals (particularly in regard to the use of

1080 poison) and directing programs for protection of threatened species and communities.

- Through a collaborative approach, increase the amount of private land managed for conservation.
- Participate in sustainable waste management projects.
- Track, coordinate and/or complement a climate change campaign in Tasmania.
- Work towards sustainable fisheries and aquaculture.
- Assess and comment upon activities and proposals likely to have significant impact on the coastal and marine environment.
- Protect existing reserves and support the expansion of the CAR reserve system to address existing shortfalls.
- Assess and comment on significant water management issues.

4. General Issues

4.1. Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Environment, Parks, Heritage and the Arts

\$24 million additional expenditure in year one, \$20 million additional per year for three years

The level of resources and administrative structures that currently exist within the Parks and Wildlife Service are insufficient to deliver on policy commitments, reserve management plans, Tasmania Together benchmarks, RFA milestones (for a world-class Parks and Reserves System) and community and visitor expectations.

For many years the PWS has failed to meet any of its key Tasmanian Together targets for protection of natural heritage:

- TT target 3.2: PWS, as with most other land management agencies, has failed to prevent establishment and spread of new pests species.
- TT target 4.1: PWS funding for management of reserves has not increased while the percentage of land in reserves has been increasing (admittedly below the TT targets).
- TT target 4.2: PWS has been a long way off its target for the percentage of protected land covered by approved management plans.
- Note: A target is yet to be set for TT standard 2.3 “The proportion of area of reserves subject to a system of reserve management audit”.

While the Tasmanian Government has in recent years invested in additional PWS resources for visitor infrastructure, as a part of the government’s investment in increased tourism infrastructure (particularly large information centres in national parks), many of the core areas of PWS responsibility remain greatly under-resourced.

The longer some of these issues go unaddressed or under-resourced the greater the eventual costs will be. Conversely, quick and decisive action by the State Government will likely prevent more serious problems developing and save the state money.

The TCT understands that the PWS is currently developing a 10-year plan to help guide its long-term prioritisation and budgeting. We fully endorse this long overdue development and have put forward budget recommendations with this in mind i.e. all our recommendations are vital to bring about the required systematic overhaul the PWS needs but some are undoubtedly more urgent than others.

4.1.1. Additional resources for land management are needed in all parks and reserves, especially to deal with a serious backlog of work with regard to management of tracks, weeds, feral animals (especially on islands), fire management and visitor services, especially outside major national parks (\$12m per year additional).

4.1.2. An independent Parks and Reserves Authority needs to be established with a legislated long-term mandate to protect and promote conservation of natural values for which areas of public land were reserved and should not be subject to the vagaries of policy priorities of passing governments and vested interests. The authority needs to oversee ongoing development of the reserve system pursuant to the national and state objectives, targets and commitments (\$2.5m establishment in year one, \$0.5m additional per year for three years).

4.1.3. A major program of professional development and recruitment needs to be put in place for the Ranger service to:

- massively expand on the existing number of rangers (with a heavy emphasis on increasing the total number of qualified rangers who are working in the field and who have the full range of requisite skills i.e. hands-on land management capabilities, technical knowledge and administrative and legal skills);
- provide expanded training opportunities to improve the skills of all staff;
- establish a graduate program to attract recently qualified people into the PWS to assist with the recruitment program and to help address the significant age and gender imbalance and low level of qualified rangers in the PWS; and
- to provide competitive career opportunities befitting such an institution (\$3m per year additional).

4.1.4. Additional resources are required to allow the PWS:

- **develop the requisite internal scientific and planning expertise**, or to adequately budget for contracting such services, (the Tasmanian PWS is the only one in the country without its own scientific staff) to facilitate development and implementation of management plans in relation to existing reserves (\$1.5m per year (\$0.5m additional and \$1.0m transfer from DPIW budget); and
- **manage areas added to the reserve system** to meet TT targets (not including the proposed CLAC reserves) (\$0.5m per year additional).

4.1.5. Additional resources for management of new reserves proposed under the CLAC process approved by State Cabinet in 2006 (including critical safety measures) (\$1.5m per year additional).

4.1.6. Expanded capacity to manage Tasmania's 14 new, two expanded and five existing marine reserves, including specialist equipment and training relevant to marine reserve management (\$2m additional in year one, \$1m per year additional for three years).

4.1.7. Additional resources to ensure PWS can contribute to the implementation of the *Tasmanian Biosecurity Strategy: Ensuring Tasmania's Biosecurity Future* that requires a whole of government approach. Key actions in the initial years will be policy development, reserve biosecurity planning, establishing threat surveillance and monitoring programs and resourcing for quick response actions (\$1m additional in year one, \$0.5m per year additional for three years).

4.1.8. Establish a new *Healthy Parks Healthy People* program in PWS, modelled on the Parks Victoria program of the same name, to broaden the use and appreciation of parks and reserves to bring about social benefits in terms of the physical, mental and spiritual health of

individuals and the community (locals and visitors). Parks also bring measurable direct and flow-on economic benefits to local, regional, state and national economies. These economic benefits are a key enabler for communities to function and prosper, allowing them to build social cohesion, social capital and healthy communities (\$1m additional in year one, \$0.5m additional per year for three years).

4.1.9. Expand the successful community partnerships program to provide greater opportunities and support for community volunteer involvement in reserve management and an increased PWS capacity to lever corporate resources and financial input (\$0.5m additional per year for four years).

4.2. Department of Primary Industries and Water

\$6.0 million additional in year one, \$4.3 million per year additional for three years

It is a high priority to expand DPIW's capacity in the areas of cat control, biosecurity, weed management and threatened species conservation on private land. DPIW's is currently making good progress in these areas but we believe there is an urgent need for additional resources for specific existing programs and for some new initiatives. Most of our recommendations relate to taking proactive and preventative action on invasive species and threatened species in rural areas or will have indirect benefits for these areas. Directing additional funds into these areas will further help to fulfil DPIW's prime role of providing professional services to the rural community.

4.2.1. Implementation of the Proposed Cat Management Strategy and Legislation

Strategic Policy Division of DPIW and RSPCA

(\$2.3m additional in year one, \$1.1m per year additional for three years)

In anticipation of its completion by the middle of 2009, significant additional resources are required for implementing the State Government's Draft *Cat Management in Tasmania* Strategy and the legislation proposed in that strategy. As previously recommended to Minister Llewellyn and in the TCT's submission to the above strategy, we believe that most of the key cat control functions that are recommended should be fulfilled by the RSPCA and therefore most resources need to be directed to them.

Additional resources to be provided to the RSPCA to:

- **establish and maintain a statewide micro-chipping record system** (as preferred system of identification of cats) (\$0.3m additional in year one, \$0.1m additional for three years);
- **establish and maintain a statewide cat breeder register and licensing system for authorized officers** (\$0.2m additional in year one, \$0.1m additional for three years);
- **fund a subsidised cat de-sexing and micro-chipping program** (covering part of the total cost) during the four years recommended prior to these measures becoming compulsory (\$0.3m per year for four years);
- **dramatically increase cat housing facilities** to cater for the likely increase in cats being abandoned or handed to RSPCA and to dispose of them through adoptions or euthanasia (\$0.5m additional in year one, \$0.2m additional for three years);
- **establish and run a four-year educational program** to encourage full community acceptance and compliance with the new cat control legislation and policies (\$0.3m additional in year one, \$0.2m additional for three years).

Additional resources to be provided to the Strategic Policy Section Division of DPIW to establish and resource a committee of stakeholders to oversee implementation of the cat management legislation and strategy (\$0.2m additional in year one, \$0.1m additional for three years).

Additional resources to be provided to the Resource Management and Conservation Division of DPIW to expand its scientific expertise to monitor cat numbers and impacts statewide including providing community cat control programs with technical support and assistance to community cat control programs. In addition to this, create a specific community facilitator position (hosted by a NGO) to initiate and help establish community cat control programs (\$0.2m additional in year one, \$0.1m additional for three years).

4.2.2. Expansion of Biosecurity Programs

Biosecurity and Product Integrity Division
(\$2.5m additional per year for four years).

Additional resources for implementation of the numerous existing plans for control of priority pests, weeds and diseases. This will compliment the generous Australian Government funding that the State already accesses but is subject to funding gaps as programs and governments change at the national level (\$1.0m additional per year).

Additional resources are needed to improved border security strategies and should include:

- **expanded capacity for rapid response actions** to eliminate new introductions into Tasmania;
- **expanded monitoring and surveillance programs** to increase the chance of early detection of new introductions into Tasmania; and
- **research to identify the likely impacts of climate change** in relation to potential new species that could be transmitted and established in Tasmania (through natural or human processes) (\$1.5m additional per year).

4.2.3. Improve the State's capacity for preventative action in relation to weeds

Weed Management Section, Resource Management and Conservation Division
(\$1.0m additional in year one, \$0.5m per year additional for three years).

Additional resources are required for the Weed Management Section to improve the State's capacity for preventative action in relation to weeds, including:

- re-invigorate and expand the *Weed Alert* program that aims to engage, train and involve a wide selection of professional and non-professional people across all sectors of the community in identifying and reporting weeds that are new to Tasmania or new to a region; and
- establish a professional and widely available weed hygiene training and monitoring program in high risk areas and work places (\$1.0m additional in year one, \$0.5m additional for three years).

4.2.4. Expanded capacity to support land owners and community groups to protect and manage threatened species

Threatened Species Section, Resource management and Conservation Division
(\$0.2m additional per year for four years)

Additional resources to allow the Threatened Species Section to provide scientific and management advice and assistance to private land owners and councils to empower them to protect threatened species on their land, including a dedicated support officer for community

groups with a threatened species focus, particularly the Threatened Plant Action Group and Understorey Network (\$0.2m additional per year for four years).

Yours sincerely,

Peter McGlone
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Tasmanian Conservation Trust