

UPPER GOULBURN (EILDON) WATER SUPPLY CATCHMENT LAND USE DETERMINATION - POLICY STATEMENT

SC/C/66

June, 1976

Under the provisions of the *Soil Conservation and Land Utilisation Act* (1958), the Soil Conservation Authority of Victoria has been charged with the responsibility for the protection of water supply catchments throughout the State. The relevant part of the *Soil Conservation and Land Utilisation Act* comprises sections 22-24 inclusive.

On 18th December, 1956, the catchment to Lake Eildon was proclaimed under section 22 (1) of the abovementioned Act. At that state it was the fourth water supply catchment to be so proclaimed, in Victoria. To the present time there are 44 proclaimed catchments, 30 of which have been land use determined.

The Eildon proclamation marked the initial interest of the Authority in the catchment to the lake - a formal statement of concern for the protection of the area. This opened the way for the Authority to make more detailed determinations of land use under section 23 (1) of the Act, which states:

"The Authority after consultation with the Land Conservation Council, shall determine:

- (a) the most suitable use in the public interest of all lands in catchment areas;
- (b) which of such lands may without deterioration of or detrimental effect to water supply catchment be used for forest pastoral agricultural or any other purpose or for any one or more purposes; and
- (c) the conditions under which various forms of land use may be permitted."

The Authority is now in a position where such a land use determination can be undertaken for portion of this catchment. The area chosen comprises approximately 87 square kilometres immediately surrounding the lake. This area was chosen because of:

- 1. its proximity to the water;
- 2. its close relation to existing planning schemes; and
- 3. the consequent high hazard it poses to water quality in the lake.

It is also the area within which there has recently been significant alteration in the pattern of land use. Pressures for changes and intensification of land use are increasing. The Authority may in future extend the boundary of the determination area to other areas within the catchment.

The land use determination aims to classify the different types of land according to the type and level of use that they can safely sustain. The final classification of land is only arrived at after extensive field studies in which a number of different criteria are considered, including climate, topography, soil type, geology, vegetation, erosion hazard, existing land use, etc. Through this examination of land use capability it is hoped that a framework will be developed on which rational decisions can be based on the future use of land in the catchment.

It should be noted at this stage, that the proposed land use determination is in no way intended to stifle further development of land in the catchment, but to ensure that any use to which the land is put is compatible with the ability of that land to sustain the proposed use and to ensure that due regard is given to water supply interests.

At present, the Authority is making positive steps towards maintaining and improving the stability and production of land in the catchment. This is being done in conjunction with local landholders in two Group Conservation Areas, covering an area of 7,140 ha at Bonnie Doon and Merton. That the Authority considers the Eildon catchment as a high priority area is evidenced by its increasing Group Conservation Area (2,931 ha) at Booroolite about to get under way and a further five areas presently under consideration. In addition, the Soil Conservation Authority provides advice on erosion control to a large number of individual landholders, and Government and semi-Government bodies, throughout the catchment.

It is hoped that in the implementation of the land use determination, the same spirit of co-operation will exist between the Authority, landholders and all other responsible authorities, which has been evident in Group Conservation Areas.

Policy Towards Various Land Use Activities Within the Catchment

1. *Grazing*

Traditionally, the majority of freehold land in the area to be land use determined has been used for the grazing of sheep and cattle.

The maintenance of a sound vegetative cover is considered a primary function of catchment management. Thus land managers will be encouraged to maintain good ground cover on grazing lands, especially in the summer months. The Authority will place emphasis on the use of improved management techniques, particularly on steep land in close proximity to the reservoir. Priority will be given to the reclamation of degraded grazing land.

Extensive pasture improvement will be encouraged to increase productivity and to reduce erosion hazard. Also, the advantage of strategic fencing of land of widely varying capability will be encouraged. All of these factors will be stressed and proceeded with according to the availability of individual community funds. Management of grazing land should aim to use grazing animals to give a sustained output of animal production and to maintain a stable system of land use, so that no soil erosion or land deterioration occurs.

2. *Timber Production*

Naturally, one of the major uses of forest areas is for timber production. However, in catchment areas, considerable attention is given to the value of forests in water production. Thus it is anticipated that the forest areas within the proposed land use determination will be managed in accordance with prescriptions formulated by the Forests Commission of Victoria in collaboration with the Soil Conservation Authority. These give guidelines and restrictions for various forest operations.

This will be especially important in the pine plantation bordering the Delatite arm of the lake where any management prescription will aim at reducing to a minimum, soil disturbance and compaction in such close proximity to the lake. Freehold forest owners will be encouraged to operate in the same way as the Forests Commission does under their prescriptions.

3. *Clearing*

As a general rule, the Authority is not in favour of further clearing within the catchment on slopes above 20°. The potential for economic use of land above this slope is marginal and the detrimental effect this can have on lower lands, both in the short and long term, warrants leaving timbered steep land in its present state. Cases of clearing of land on slopes less than 20° will be dealt with individually according to their importance for catchment protection.

4. *Subdivision of Land*

In recent years there has been a marked increase in the amount of land being subdivided into smaller blocks. These blocks vary in size from building blocks of 0.5 ha or less, to "hobby farms", mostly between 4 and 10 ha. This change in land use imposes considerably increased pressures on the land and the lake, due to the intrusion of roads and tracks, horses, effluent disposal, alteration of grazing patterns, etc. Thus the fragmentation of land must be looked at carefully.

The Authority is not opposed to all subdivision. Rather, it considers each proposal on its merits, i.e., it considers the ability of the land to sustain the proposed development without detrimental effects to either the land or water resource. In general, the Authority is not in favour of small acre subdivisions in the following situations:-

- (a) along major watercourses;
- (b) close to fully supply level of the lake;
- (c) on steep land;
- (d) in areas of proven high erosion hazard.

In all considerations regarding the subdivision of land, the Soil Conservation Authority wishes to co-operate and plan in conjunction with the other responsible authorities, in order to achieve the best form of development in the public interest.

5. Recreation

Recreational activity around the Lake foreshore is causing some erosion and water turbidity where traffic of people and vehicles is heavy. It will be Authority policy to discourage intensive recreational development in the sensitive areas listed below.

6. Roadworks

Roadworks are associated, to a greater or lesser degree, with all of the above activities. Because of the requirements and nature of construction of roads, they are significant contributors of stream sediment. The Soil Conservation Authority would like to see an improvement in the standard of roading throughout the catchment area, particularly in close proximity to the water storage and major streams, whether they involve private landholders, or Government or semi-Government bodies.

The Authority will encourage the following principles in road design and construction:-

- (a) proposed road alignment should be carefully assessed to ensure that potential erosion problems are minimal;
- (b) avoid steep cross slopes so that earthworks are kept to a minimum. Avoid stream and drainage line crossings;
- (c) efficient and effective road drainage is necessary to avoid concentrating runoff which produces scouring velocities and erosion. Culverts and cut-off drains need to be located strategically to reduce erosion problems;
- (d) road grades should be kept to a minimum;
- (e) stabilisation of roadside batters should be planned for, and effectively carried out.

6. Other

Other industries and activities may arise, some of which cannot be foreseen. These must be dealt with as they occur and considered within the bounds of the land capability.

The statements above are an outline of the Soil Conservation Authority's broad policy to the major activities within the area of the Eildon catchment proposed for a land use determination. Specific details and guidelines relating to this policy may be obtained from the District Conservation Officer at the Authority's Alexandra office - telephone (057) 72 1433.

R A FITT
Secretary