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Submission

to

The Department of Trade and Investment

(Secretariat, Livestock Health and Pest Authority Review

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on

The Livestock, Health and Pest Authority Review

Compiled by John Edwards

Honorary Secretary

Clarence Environment Centre

Date: 24th September 2011

Submission to Review of the Livestock Health and Pest Authority Specifically Travelling Stock Reserves (TSR).

Dear Sir/Madam

Introduction

The Clarence Environment Centre has maintained a shop-front in Grafton for over 22 years, and has been a strong advocate for conservation of our unique environment. As such we have always seen the values of travelling stock reserves (TSRs), currently managed by the Livestock Health and Pest Authority (LHPA), in providing wildlife habitat.

Summary.

There are three main issues we would like to be considered in the Review process:

1. We believe it is crucial for Travelling Stock Reserves to be retained to provide wildlife migration corridors in the face of climate change. We believe the focus of their management should reflect the enhancement of ecological sustainability. The LHPA, or the Office of Environment and Heritage are likely to be the best choices to manage these reserves.
2. Whoever is chosen to manage those reserves, they should be fully qualified, and trained to identify and manage the ecological values these corridors already contain.
3. We believe the responsibilities of Government veterinarians, employed by the LHPS, should be expanded to cover native wildlife, with appropriate additional training provided accordingly. Currently, wildlife carer organisations like WIRES struggle to find appropriate private practitioners with adequate expertise in treating native wildlife.

Background.

In march, 2009, Chair of the National Biodiversity Strategy Review Task Group, circulated a letter introducing "Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010-2020". In that letter, Mr Holmes states that: *"It is now well understood that the decline of Australia's biodiversity and the loss of critical ecosystem services that they provide has the potential to impact on all sectors of our society and economy"*.

Furthermore, in relation to the Federal Government's previous 1996 Strategy, the circulated Consultation draft acknowledges (page 10) that: *"We observe and note report after report of the downward trend in our biodiversity: the Australia State of the Environment 2006 report found that biodiversity is in serious decline (Beeton et al. 2006); the second environmental performance review of Australia by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2008, reports that despite improved efforts the downward trend in the conservation status of some species continues."*

From these statements it is clear that, despite a seemingly impressive list of "current work", that earlier Strategy had failed to achieve its stated objectives, to reverse the declines.

Travelling Stock Reserves

There are literally 10s of thousands of kilometres of TSR's across NSW that are currently managed by the LHPA (see map in Appendix A below). They are largely unspoiled and still vegetated, and currently provide a critical network of corridors containing wildlife habitat, both endemic to specific areas and migratory species, allowing fauna species to move relatively freely across the landscape.

The Clarence Valley Council Biodiversity Management Strategy is typical of all biodiversity management plans across Australia, in identifying that: “*Travelling Stock Routes, particularly west of Grafton and in the escarpment areas, and many road reserves contain rare and important vegetation and habitat and provide an interconnected framework of corridors across the landscape*”.

With climate change happening, these corridors become even more crucial to allowing fauna species to migrate to more suitable areas, either at higher, cooler altitudes, or to cooler southern latitudes, and must be protected.

Also, the Strategy states that: “*Development consent must not be granted unless Council has had regard to any potential adverse impacts on (vi) the biodiversity values with a reserve, including a road reserve or a stock route*”.

Therefore, we believe the LHPA should have an important role to play in helping reverse species declines through refocusing its management strategies to concentrate on enhancing the biodiversity values of this great network.

Concerns about current management

The Clarence Environment Centre has identified several concerns in recent years over the management of TSRs, particularly in correspondence with the previous Minister for Primary Industries, the Hon. Ian MacDonald. These were in relation to excessive vegetation clearing for fencing, ring-barking of trees, and inappropriate burning in riparian habitats as a form of weed control.

Regrettably, the ex Minister, or the subordinate who responded, did not share our concerns. However, given the review, we ask that appropriate ecological training be given to LHPA officers, to improve their skills and allow them to recognise environmental matters when they arise.

Wildlife care.

We believe the responsibilities of Government veterinarians, under the LHPS should be extended to cover native wildlife, with appropriate additional training provided. This would help fill the current void of trained practitioners in the care of wildlife.

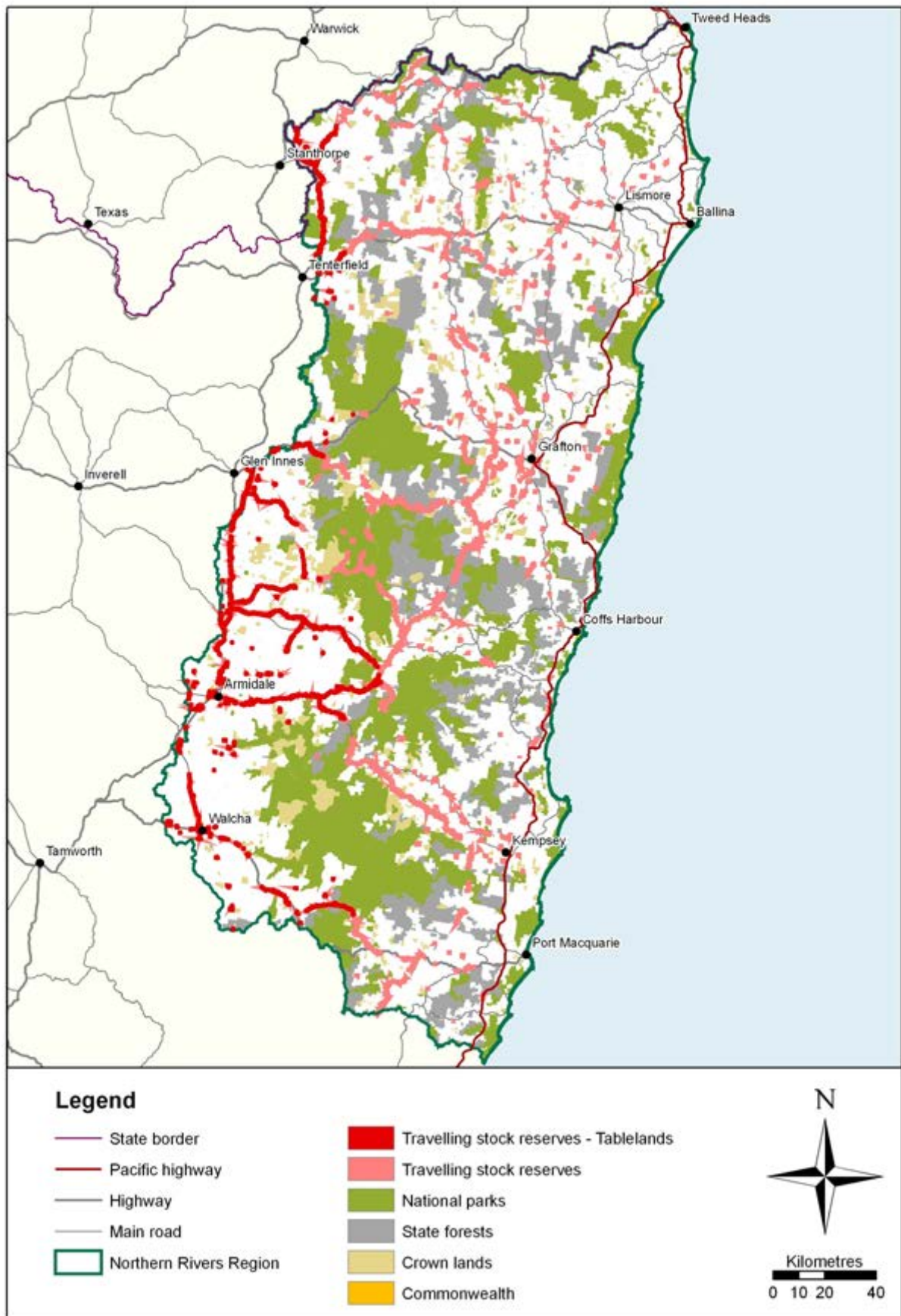
Currently, wildlife carer organisations like WIRES struggle to find appropriate private practitioners that are prepared to operate *pro-bono*, or have adequate expertise in handling and treating native wildlife, and are suitably vaccinated to handle animals such as Flying Foxes, that can infect humans with *Lissavirus*.

As the majority of species continue to exhibit population declines across Australia, the specialist care of these animals becomes ever more critical, which we believe could be filled by Government veterinarians.

We thank you for the opportunity to comment

John Edwards
Honorary Secretary

Travelling Stock Routes of Northern Rivers Region of NSW



Map from the Northern Rivers Regional Biodiversity Strategy 2010