

**Minister for Primary Industries and Water**  
**Minister for Racing**

Level 5, 4 Salamanca Place HOBART TAS 7000 Australia  
GPO Box 123 HOBART TAS 7001 Australia  
Phone: 03) 6165 7794  
Email: [sarah.courtney@dpac.tas.gov.au](mailto:sarah.courtney@dpac.tas.gov.au)



4 JUL 2018

Dr Wendy Craik  
Agriculture Review (Aither)  
Level 2, 45 Exhibition Street  
MELBOURNE VICTORIA 3000

Dear Dr Craik

I am writing in relation to the independent review of the interactions between the agriculture and food production sector and the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act), commissioned by the Australian Government.

I commend the Australian Government for recognising the need for a review that will reduce red tape and regulatory duplication for our farmers and producers. The Tasmanian Government has a target to grow the annual farmgate value of the agricultural sector to \$10 billion per year by 2050. This sector in Tasmania is diverse and a significant contributor to Tasmania's economy, especially in regional areas. To achieve this target requires a regulatory system that supports the sustainable growth of the sector.

The Briefing Paper for the Review identifies a number of key issues of relevance to Tasmania. I understand that you will be consulting directly with farmers and agricultural stakeholders in Tasmania to better understand their issues, concerns and questions relating to their obligations under the EPBC Act. Importantly, this consultation will provide the Australian Government with clear insight into the challenges that the Tasmanian agriculture and food production sector faces in its interaction with the processes and regulations of the EPBC Act.

Increased or duplicated regulation through the EPBC Act can disproportionately increase the cost of compliance for farmers and private landowners, and is not aligned with the shared Commonwealth and State interest to reduce red tape. Tasmania has in place a comprehensive regulatory framework to ensure that policy and legislation consider economic, social and environmental objectives, while allowing sectors such as agriculture and food production to grow in a sustainable manner.

For example, Tasmanian farmers have raised legitimate concerns about the potential listings of threatened vegetation communities under the EPBC Act, in relation to duplication of existing state regulation, costs of added regulatory burden and also recognition of potential socio-economic impacts. Tasmania has a comprehensive regulatory framework in place to manage clearance and conversion of native vegetation and forestry operations. Under Tasmanian law, any land use activity – forestry or non-forestry – that has the potential to impact on threatened communities is regulated through the Forest Practices System. Furthermore, proponents of non-forestry activities already need to consider any potential impacts under the EPBC Act.

While there are cost recovery exemptions for small businesses, this does not include the often substantial cost outlay for specialist assessments or advice that needs to be sought to understand referral or assessment requirements under the EPBC Act. Additional decision-making tools and further guidance for individual farmers, private landholders and businesses regarding referrals, condition thresholds and “significance” would increase the understanding of obligations under the Act.

I am encouraged by the Australian Government’s focus on the agriculture and food production sector and, importantly, that the review includes undertaking direct consultation with farmers in Tasmania. I expect that the findings of the review will help to get the balance right between protecting our environment and allowing the agriculture and food production sector to continue growing sustainably.

We look forward to reviewing the outcomes of the independent review and participating in the comprehensive review of the EPBC Act, which is due to commence later in 2018.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized, overlapping loop and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Hon Sarah Courtney MP  
Minister for Primary Industries and Water