Commercial forestry in the Mount Lofty Ranges region

New planning rules proposed

Public comment sought

The State Government is proposing changes to the planning rules ('policies') applying to commercial forestry development in seven council areas across the Mount Lofty Ranges region.

The councils affected are:

- The Barossa Council
- Adelaide Hills Council
- District Council of Mount Barker
- Alexandrina Council
- City of Victor Harbor
- District Council of Yankalilla, and
- Sections of the City of Onkaparinga located within the area covered by the Outer Metropolitan Planning Strategy

The proposed changes introduce consistency in policy that will apply across existing zones which already envisage commercial forestry as a potential activity within those councils (that is, the changes do not alter the boundaries of existing zones, but introduce new or consistent policy for where such development is already envisaged).

The policy changes are outlined briefly inside this Information Sheet and essentially involve ensuring that commercial forests are established in the most appropriate locations to limit their impact on the environment, and have appropriate bushfire protection measures incorporated.

Detail on the proposed changes is contained in a Development Plan Amendment (DPA) document, released by the Minister for Urban Development and Planning for public consultation until Monday 21 April 2008.

What is a Development Plan Amendment (DPA)?

A Development Plan contains the zones, maps and explicit rules ('policies') which guide what can and cannot be done in the future with any piece of land within the area covered by the Plan. These zones, maps and policies provide the detailed criteria against which development applications are assessed.

A Development Plan Amendment (DPA) is a document that proposes changes to a Development Plan. This DPA seeks to change the rules (but not zone boundaries) for commercial forestry in the seven council Development Plans identified above.

There are strict processes surrounding a DPA. A key part in the DPA process is to formally release the DPA document to give members of the public a chance to make written comments about proposed changes. At the end of the submission period a public meeting is scheduled. Submitters can request to comment further about the DPA at this meeting.
Background

Commercial forestry has occurred within SA since the late 1800s, with the first commercial forestry plantation established in 1876. In particular, plantations of Radiata Pines have been established in many parts of South Australia, including throughout the Mount Lofty Ranges region.

Since the 1970s forestry development within this region has been generally limited to small-scale farm forestry and revegetation on existing cleared agricultural land or land previously used for commercial forestry. Recent applications, however, have demonstrated a growing demand for, and interest in, the establishment of new forestry plantations in the Mount Lofty Ranges region.

This growing market is, in part, due to the suitable climatic and land conditions of the region; amendments to the Forestry Property Act 2000 which increase economic incentives for the establishment of commercial forestry plantations; increasing export markets for plantation timber; and the pending release of a National Carbon Emissions Trading Scheme, for which commercial forestry may play a key role.

In recognition of the environmental, economic and social significance of commercial forestry for the Outer Metropolitan Region, the Minister for Environment and Conservation and the Minister for Forests have agreed on a range of actions to assist in the consistent, safe development of such forestry.

One of those actions was to decide that applications for commercial forestry that are over 20ha in size and within the seven council areas will be determined by the Development Assessment Commission.

Another was to request the Minister for Urban Development and Planning to undertake a Ministerial Development Plan Amendment to implement consistent land use policy and introduce consistent public notification categories for commercial forestry within the region.

What changes are being proposed?

The proposed changes seek to introduce policies into the Development Plans which:

• ensure that commercial forests are established in the most appropriate locations to limit their impact on the environment, on valued existing vegetation and water courses (with their impact on water quality, in particular in the Fleurieu, a key consideration)

• ensure that commercial forests are appropriately set back from dwellings and powerlines and that bushfire protection measures are followed, including firebreaks and vehicle access

• designate commercial forestry as a Category 2 form of development in areas that have been recognised as being appropriate for such development (Category 2 means that owners or occupiers of land adjacent to a proposed development are notified about, and able to comment on, a proposal when it is lodged, but are not able to prevent it from proceeding)

Interim Operation

The DPA will be on ‘Interim Operation’ for 12 months from the start of the public consultation period. This means that the policies contained in it will apply during this time.

Interim Operation is used when the Minister considers that it is necessary in the interests of orderly and proper development. In this case, the Minister wishes to ensure that the issues outlined above must be addressed immediately when a development proposal is received for a commercial forest in an area already zoned for this type of use.

This does not mean however that changes to the policies cannot occur following the consultation; changes can occur if considered appropriate and your views and those of other individuals and organisations will certainly be taken into account.
Want to know more?

You can view the detailed DPA document online at www.planning.sa.gov.au/go/ForestryDPA or in hard copy by visiting:

- The offices of any of the seven affected councils
- Planning SA, Level 5, 136 North Terrace, Adelaide (tel: (08) 8303 0791)

**Area Affected Map**
Have your say

The consultation process will be run by the Development Policy Advisory Committee, an independent statutory committee which provides advice to the Minister on planning and development issues. The consultation will include the acceptance of written submissions and two public meetings.

Written submissions

Written submissions on the DPA will be received for a period of two months, from Thursday 21 February 2008 to Monday 21 April 2008.

Submissions should be sent to:

‘The Presiding Member, Development Policy Advisory Committee’:

- By post to: c/- Planning SA, GPO Box 1815, Adelaide SA 5001
- By email to: plnsa.dpac@sa.gov.sa.gov.au
- Or by fax to: (08) 8303 0627

Please note: Public submissions will be available for viewing from the close of submissions at Planning SA, Level 5, 136 North Terrace, Adelaide until the conclusion of the public meetings, and will also be available for viewing on the Planning SA website at www.planning.sa.gov.au/go/ForestryDPA. Written submissions should clearly indicate whether you wish to be heard at one of the scheduled public meetings.

Public consultation meetings

Following the close of written submissions, two public meetings at which submitters can present verbally are scheduled:

- Monday 5 May 2008 at 7.00 pm in the Ballroom, Auchendarroch House, 17 Adelaide Road, Mt Barker
- Thursday 8 May 2008 at 7.00 pm in the Investigator Room, Whalers Inn Resort, 121 Franklin Parade, Encounter Bay

Important note: the public meetings will not be held if no submissions are received or if no one requests to be heard – please check the Planning SA website before the scheduled date of the hearing to find out whether it is being held. If you want to make a verbal submission you must state this in your written submission.

What happens then?

Following the consultation process and the receipt of a report from the Development Policy Advisory Committee, the Minister will consider whether to make amendments to the DPA, and then whether to proceed with its implementation. If the DPA is adopted, the policy and mapping changes proposed will be made to the seven relevant Development Plans.

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