**Draft Questionnaire – Social Impact Assessment of Native Vegetation Clearing Application**

Clearing native vegetation might cause changes that affect people’s way of life, sense of place, or physical amenity. The following questionnaire asks you to think about these social impacts of your proposal – that is, the effects (positive or negative) that it may have on yourself and on other people. Other people may experience the clearing differently to how you experience it, so it is important to consider and listen to everyone’s views.

For each question below, please consider how you and others expect the vegetation clearing to have a social impact, whether positive or negative. A ‘social impact’ refers to the ways in which other people may be affected by the clearing, or how they expect it to affect their lives. Provide some practical examples to help explain the impact. For further assistance please refer to the attached Questionnaire Guide.

*1. Please summarise the proposed native vegetation clearing (e.g. species, number, location, area).*

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*2. In what ways will this clearing be socially beneficial for you and your property? (‘Socially beneficial’ refers to benefits to your way of life, your amenity, your wellbeing, and/or your livelihood, for example, rather than to financial benefits). Please provide evidence (e.g. from comparable examples elsewhere) to support your assessment.*

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*3. Please list any people, properties, and businesses that may experience some change as a result of the proposed clearing. You should consider near neighbours, others in the local community, and anyone else who may have an interest in your proposal, so that their views can be considered fairly.*

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*4. In what ways might people experience these changes?*

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| **Type of impact** | **Impacts on your neighbours and others who may be affected, either positively or negatively** |
| 4.1 Impacts on people’s livelihoods (ability to sustain themselves) |  |
| 4.2 Impacts on people’s way of life (e.g. farming practices, daily activities, how people use the land) |  |
| 4.3 Impacts on people’s visual amenity (views and vistas) |  |
| 4.4 Impacts on people’s access to things they need |  |
| 4.5 Impacts on people’s use of services provided by vegetation proposed to be cleared (e.g. food, shade, pollination, evaporation control, fire/flood mitigation) |  |
| 4.6 Impacts on people’s overall health, wellbeing, and sense of place (how they feel connected to the locality and its character) |  |

*5. What have you done to find out the views of your neighbours and other people in your community with regard to your proposal (e.g., informal discussion, semi-formal interview, community forum)?*

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*6. What (if any) changes to your proposal are you considering as a result of identifying the above impacts (e.g., reducing the area to be cleared; staging the clearing over time; replanting suitable species in different location)?*

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**Draft Questionnaire Guide**

This guidance is intended to assist Applicants in completing the Questionnaire and in identifying the social impacts relating to clearing native vegetation. The social impact assessment will form part of the information provided to the Native Vegetation Panel, which must ensure that social considerations are effectively integrated into natural resource management decisions alongside environmental and economic considerations. The social impact assessment should consider the following matters:

1. SCALE

Are the identified social impacts **proportionate** to the scale of the proposal? Often the social impacts of clearing a relatively small number of trees are fewer and less significant than those of a large-scale proposal over a large area of land.

1. IDENTIFYING IMPACTS

The application should explain **how people will experience, or expect to experience***,* the vegetation clearing, whether positively or negatively. For example, the social impacts of small-scale clearing of native rainforest for farming might include:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *Impacts on others* | |
| POSITIVE | NEGATIVE |
| Enhanced community wellbeing owing to increased local economic activity.  Support for local and regional businesses (income and employment) through contributions to buoyant rural sector.  Increased community cohesion among local farmers and producers.  Improved overall wellbeing for local farm workers who will be employed on the property.  Greater safety through managing rural fire risk. | Reduced visual amenity and aesthetic value of local surroundings owing to loss of rainforest remnant.  Potential runoff from cleared land affecting neighbouring properties and waterways.  Loss of services provided to neighbouring properties (e.g. wind buffer, nutrient cycling, crop pollination, erosion and flood control).  Loss of sense of place as a ‘natural’ environment.  Loss of / impacts on Aboriginal cultural values. |

Consideration should also be given to the implications of NOT proceeding with the land clearing. This enables the Native Vegetation Panel to evaluate the two alternative **scenarios** on their merits.

1. CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Firstly, when the various social impacts of the proposal are considered *in combination*, does the **combined impact** become greater than the sum of the individual impacts, from the point of view of the people affected?

Secondly, when the various social impacts of the proposal are considered alongside social impacts *of any other existing or anticipated projects in the locality*, does the **cumulative impact** become greater than the sum of the individual impacts, from the point of view of the people affected?

1. SIGNIFICANCE

Not all impacts carry equal weight in determining the merits of the application. Please consider the following matters to assess the significance of each impact:

* 1. how long it will last for (**duration**)
  2. how many people may be affected (**extent**)
  3. degree of change from current social conditions and experience (**severity**)
  4. how adaptable/resilient people are to the change (**sensitivity**)
  5. how **concerned or appreciative** people are.

1. MITIGATION

If significant negative social impacts are likely, how do you propose to address them? Applying the mitigation hierarchy, preference is to avoid, then to minimise, then to mitigate. Mitigation measures should relate directly to the relevant impact, rather than being a trade-off or compensation for a different impact. Mitigation measures for social impacts are most likely to be effective if the affected people agree that they are acceptable, any evidence of such agreement may be submitted with the application.

1. CONSULTING AFFECTED PEOPLE

If other people may be affected by, or interested in, the native vegetation clearing, have you asked for their views on the proposal? Do they agree with the characterisation of social impacts in the application? Do they agree that the proposed mitigation measures will be effective? Having their views sought and faithfully documented can substantially help to understand the likely impacts and effectiveness of mitigation. It may be necessary to conduct third-party engagement with neighbours and other affected people to verify the assessment.