

Shock for SA farmers over clearing of land

New Government controls on land clearing have shocked SA's farming community. Kept a close secret until Thursday to "prevent panic clearing," they put buyers of scrubland for future development in a precarious position.

And there will be no compensation for those landowners who will not be allowed to increase farm size through clearance, or start new farms on scrubland.

The restrictions became effective immediately they were announced and the Government will enforce them with the help of Landsat and other aerial surveys.

They were such a closely guarded secret that not even the Stock Journal knew about them until the Government asked on Thursday to distribute a "clearance controls" booklet in this week's paper.

Neither the Stock Journal nor the United Farmers and Stockowners were asked to attend a press conference called by the Minister of Environment and Planning, Dr. Hopgood.

The regulations mean landowners will have to apply to the SA Planning Commission for consent to clear native vegetation, and penalties for those who clear without consent include a maximum fine of \$10,000.

Dr. Hopgood said the controls would not amount to a prohibition on further land clearance, but would ensure a reasonable balance was achieved between the respective needs of agriculture and conservation.

But United Farmers and Stockowners land use committee chairman, Mr. Don Pfitzner, said agriculture had already seceded some of its best land to urban development.

If agriculture were not allowed to expand in less productive areas, it would mean farming in SA was being cramped into what land had already been cleared.

"Perhaps we should have a moratorium on urban development on land suitable for agriculture," he added.

He criticised Dr. Hopgood's broad statement on the "many areas" of marginal and even arid land that had been cleared, and challenged him to name these areas.

"He has not substantiated that statement with facts," Mr. Pfitzner said.

Also, the UFS was not happy with the booklet being circulated by the Government because, "according to that, we can't even chop firewood for sale."

He also attacked the Minister's reference to land being cleared "at the rate of 999 tennis courts a day."

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