NSW DPI

Living and Working in Rural Areas

A handbook for managing land use conflict issues on the NSW North Coast

Rob Learmonth, Rik Whitehead, Bill Boyd and Stephen Fletcher
Centre for Coastal Agricultural Landscapes

in partnership with

Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authority

NSW DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY INDUSTRIES

Northern Rivers CMA CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY

Southern Cross UNIVERSITY
A new way to think

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An initiative and product of the Centre for Coastal Agricultural Landscapes – an alliance established by Southern Cross University (SCU) and the NSW Department of Primary Industries (NSW DPI) – in partnership with the Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authority. Funded by the Natural Heritage Trust.

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The contribution of a large number of regional stakeholders is acknowledged though too numerous to name individually without risking leaving someone out. These stakeholders provided a valuable view of rural land use conflict from the perspective of rural industries, land use planners, farmers, local government, state government, natural resource organisations, environment organisations and Aboriginal cultural heritage. This input is greatly appreciated and acknowledged.

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Disclaimer

The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (December 2007). Users are reminded of the need to ensure that information on which they rely is up to date, and to check the currency of the information with the appropriate department or the user's independent advisor.

Foreword

The Northern Rivers region, which spans the coast and eastern slopes between Taree and Tweed Heads, is the third most biodiverse region in Australia. Since the 1970s, there has been a rapid increase in population and urban expansion in the area. The Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authority (NRCMA) recognises that these changes are putting great pressure on fragile natural resources, Aboriginal cultural landscapes and rural industry development. This growth has demanded that all levels of government look at the strategic management of land use.

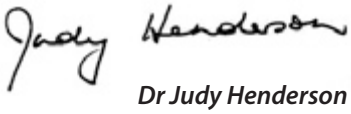
The Northern Rivers Catchment Action Plan is the only catchment plan in NSW that specifically targets land use planning as integral to effective natural resource management. This is in recognition of the potential for conflict that can arise in our community between competing and differing land uses and the impact this has on both primary production and amenity values.

Effective land use planning can reduce environmental costs, reduce conflict between rural land use and development, as well as promote an understanding of the need to protect key natural resources and cultural landscapes in the planning of new settlements.

The NRCMA commissioned this project through our Natural Heritage Trust Investment Strategy in response to requests for information and guidelines, not only to help with land use planning but also to reduce neighbourhood conflict.

We are extremely pleased with the comprehensive way in which the Centre for Coastal Agricultural Landscapes has explored the issues and developed this valuable resource in an easy-to read format for a wide range of users. This collaborative partnership with regional stakeholders, including landowners, local government, rural industry representatives, environment organisations and state agencies, and the Centre (an alliance between NSW Department of Primary Industries and Southern Cross University) has increased regional understanding of rural land use conflict and interface issues as well as increased our collective capacity to reduce land use conflict through practical actions and improved decision making.

While specifically written for the North Coast community, this handbook can be adapted for use in other areas to help predict and manage conflict over many different competing uses of land and resources. The handbook will be a valuable component and resource for future training aimed at reducing and addressing rural land use conflict issues.



Dr Judy Henderson
Chair
Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authority

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Preface

Living and working in rural areas is for many people mostly a very enjoyable and rewarding experience. However, our rural areas contain a diverse range of rural pursuits, a diversity of people, and a rich natural and cultural heritage. This diversity and richness, combined with changing circumstances and changing land use, has in the past created tensions and conflicts in our rural areas.

Various mechanisms and strategies have been applied on the north coast to manage conflict associated with change in land use and between neighbouring land uses. These responses, however, have been fragmented, incomplete and not consistently applied across the region, and neighbour disputes and complaints over the use of our rural areas and protection of the environment and heritage values continue.

This handbook represents a consolidation of practices, strategies and products arising from responses to this issue over many years. The handbook provides an integrated and holistic approach to managing and avoiding land use conflict and disputes in our rural areas. Land use change and the expression of differing points of view as to the use and management of our rural areas will most likely continue, however, to be a feature of living and working in rural areas of the north coast.

Who is the handbook for?

The handbook has been divided into chapters that describe the key elements and strategies for managing and reducing land use conflict issues. Each chapter was developed with different audiences in mind, including:

- consulting planners and land developers
- land use planners within local government
- decision makers within local and state government
- users of natural resources including farmers and land managers
- managers of natural resource assets such as landholders, and government departments and the local catchment management authority
- people living and working in rural communities
- people intending to buy a rural property.

What's in it?

This handbook is designed as a practical reference for a wide cross section of the community. It brings together the following information:

- background to the key land use conflict and interface issues confronting the north coast
- existing material of relevance to managing land use conflict at the interface, including the key issues and tools available
- existing and any new material collated into a succinct presentation of the key principles to do with managing land use conflict

- existing and new material synthesised into guides for reducing and managing land use conflict in the typical land use conflict scenarios that confront land users, natural resource managers and regulators
- descriptions of local environmental plans and new land use strategies that will be prepared over the coming years
- recommended and practical mechanisms to reduce and manage neighbour-to-neighbour conflicts
- references to current best management practice for primary industries that help in reducing impacts on key natural resources and neighbours.
- resources including useful publications, websites and further contacts for those seeking additional information.

Chapter	Description	Audience
1	Defines land use conflict; its linkages to other state wide and regional initiatives and outlines how the initiatives described in this handbook can help reduce land use conflict between farmers, the environment and other rural landowners.	All readers.
2	Outlines factors to consider in buying a rural property, including a property inspection checklist.	People thinking of buying a rural property and real estate agents.
3	Highlights the importance of duty of care and current best management practice in undertaking a rural enterprise to reduce land use conflict and create a good neighbour ethic.	Farming community. Extension and regulatory authorities. New rural property owners.
4	Provides some answers and responses to the most common rural land use conflict issues.	All readers.
5	The planning framework for avoiding rural land use conflict including the opportunities for avoiding rural land use conflict and interface issues via strategic land use planning and local environmental planning.	Local government, State agencies, people with an interest in local plan making and managers of natural resource assets.
6	Describes conflict issues associated with new development and how to manage and control land use conflict and interface issues at the development stage including the application of buffers to separate incompatible land uses.	State and local government, developers, consultants and people with an interest in new development.
7	Highlights the importance of communication and offers suggestions for resolving disputes.	All readers.

CHAPTER 1

Rural land use conflict at the interface

Snapshot

The north coast is a place of change. Its population is growing rapidly, its urban areas are expanding and economic imperatives are changing the nature of rural industry and production. Subdivision of rural areas and the changing nature of rural areas have created potential for conflict, while urban development along the edges of our main towns and villages continues to encroach onto both sensitive environmental areas and important natural resources.

If not managed effectively, these changes have the potential to compromise environmental assets, the cultural heritage of the region and limit the productive potential of the natural resources base. Growth and development on the north coast continue to place pressures on important natural resource assets and the use of natural resources for primary production, and land use conflict and interface issues are resulting from this pressure.

This chapter explains the origins of interface issues and the negative consequences than occur between land uses at the interface which result in land use conflicts. The chapter describes the key sources of conflict and sets the scene for responding to conflicts in a constructive way.

What are rural land use conflicts at the interface?

A land use conflict occurs when there is disagreement or dispute as to the use of land and/or a feeling that a person's rights or well being or the rights of the environment are being threatened by an action or undertaking of another or the inaction of another.

The common perception is that most land use conflicts are the result of two dissimilar or incompatible land uses next to each other. In fact, the root cause of conflict is when a land use or an action is incompatible with the views, expectations and values of the people living and working in an area. These values include; intrinsic value of the environment; maintenance of water quality/quantity; protection of wildlife and native vegetation; the right to use and enjoy land; personal and community health; clean air; personal responsibility; consideration of others; recognition and protection of indigenous and non indigenous cultural heritage.

Land use conflict is largely the negative aspects of land use that occurs at the interface. Each city, town, village and property has an interface with an adjoining land use and adjoining land owner. Many aspects of living and working at the interface can be positive such as an urban block which over looks farmland or adjoins a picturesque waterway, the small hobby farm that enjoys open space by the fact the next door neighbour runs a large grazing property. However, conflict occurs at the interface because the land uses might be quite different. The occupiers and users of the land often have different expectations and views as to their rights and responsibilities of being a landowner or person living at the interface. The interface is also an area where development merges with or encroaches on more natural areas that afford various levels of protection such as national parks, habitat, waterways and wetlands.

How do we respond to these conflicts? There are many approaches, which are described in this handbook. Coordinating approaches is important and the main way this is done on the North Coast is through documents such as catchment management plans and regional strategies. The Northern Rivers Catchment Action Plan (CAP) has identified land use conflict as an important natural resource management issue and has set the following management target.

> *By 2016 land use conflict within or adjacent to key environmental assets and rural production areas reduced by 90 percent. Key environmental assets include State and regionally significant farmland, high conservation value vegetation and ecosystems and extractive resources.*

What are rural land use conflict issues?

A wide range of issues can constitute land use conflicts and interface issues. On the north coast the most common are those that arise between agricultural practices (sources) and neighbouring residents (receptors). Many of these conflicts are unreported although some are referred to local and state agencies, where they may or may not be documented. Table 1 is a summary of the most common rural land use conflict issues of the north coast.

Table 1: Typical rural land use conflict issues in the north coast region

Issue	Explanation
Absentee landholders	Neighbours may be relied upon to manage issues such as bush fires, straying stock, trespassers etc. while the absentee landholder is at work or away.
Access	Traditional or informal 'agreements' for access between farms and to parts of farms may break down with the arrival of new people.
Catchment management	Design, funding and implementation of land, water and vegetation management plans are complicated with larger numbers of rural land-holders with differing perspectives and values.
Clearing	Neighbours may object to the clearing of trees, especially when it is done apparently without approvals or impacts on habitat areas or local amenity.
Cooperation	Lack of mutual co-operation through the inability or unwillingness on behalf individuals to contribute may curtail or limit traditional 'work sharing' practices on-farm or in the rural community
Dogs	Stray domestic dogs and wild dogs attacking livestock and wildlife and causing a nuisance.
Drainage	Blocking or changing drainage systems through a lack of maintenance or failure to cooperate and not respect the rights of others.
Dust	Generated by farm and extractive industry operations including cultivating, fallow (bare) ground, farm vehicles, livestock yards, feed milling, fertiliser spreading etc.
Dwellings	Urban or residential dwellings located too close to or affecting an existing rural pursuit or routine land use practice.

cont./3

Table 1 cont.

Issue	Explanation
Electric fences	Electric shocks to children, horses and dogs. Public safety issues.
Fencing	Disagreement about maintenance, replacement, design and cost.
Fire	Risk of fire escaping and entering neighbouring property. Lack of knowledge of fire issues and the role of the Rural Fire Service.
Firearms	Disturbance, maiming and killing of livestock and pest animals, illegal use and risk to personal safety.
Flies	Spread from animal enclosures or manure and breeding areas.
Heritage management	Destruction and poor management of indigenous and non indigenous cultural artefacts, structures and sites.
Lights	Bright lights associated with night loading, security etc
Litter	Injury and poisoning of livestock via wind blown and dumped waste. Damage to equipment and machinery. Amenity impacts.
Noise	From farm machinery, scare guns, low flying agricultural aircraft, livestock weaning and feeding, and irrigation pumps.
Odours	Odours arising from piggeries, feedlots, dairies, poultry, sprays, fertiliser, manure spreading, silage, burning carcases/crop residues.
Pesticides	Perceived and real health and environmental concerns over the use, storage and disposal of pesticides as well as spray drift.
Poisoning	Deliberate poisoning and destruction of trees/plants. Spray drift onto non-target plants. Pesticide or poison uptake by livestock and human health risks.
Pollution	Water resources contaminated by effluent, chemicals, pesticides, nutrients and air borne particulates.
Roads	Cost and standards of maintenance, slow/wide farm machinery, livestock droving and manure.
Smoke	From the burning of crop residues, scrub, pasture and windrows
Soil erosion	Loss of soil and pollution of water ways from unsustainable practices or exposed soils. Lack of adequate groundcover or soil protection.
Straying livestock	Fence damage, spread of disease, damage to crops, gardens and bush/rainforest regeneration.
Theft/vandalism	Interference with crops, livestock, fodder, machinery and equipment.
Tree removal	Removal of native vegetation without appropriate approvals. Removal of icon trees and vegetation.
Trespass	Entering properties unlawfully and without agreement.
Visual/amenity	Loss of amenity as a result of reflective structures (igloos, hail netting), windbreaks plantings (loss of view).
Water	Competition for limited water supplies, compliance with water regulations, building of dams, changes to flows. Stock access to waterways. Riparian zone management.
Weeds	Lack of weed control particularly noxious weeds, by landholders.

Based on: Smith, RJ (2003) *Rural Land Use Conflict: Review of Management Techniques – Final Report to Lismore Living Centres* (PlanningNSW).

While the issues in Table 1 are the most common rural land conflicts on the North Coast, this handbook deals with other issues as well. The reason for this is that land use conflicts extend beyond issues that affect an individuals' enjoyment of land, and include broader community concerns about the local environment and the way the environment is being managed or used. As the population of the North Coast grows and development expands, new interface situations will arise, especially those between urban development and natural environments.

Why manage these issues?

Land use conflicts can result in a variety of undesirable social, economic, environmental and cultural impacts ranging from minor to significant, short term to long term and micro to macro in scale. These impacts can include: negative effects on individuals as a consequence of stress and anxiety; breakdown in communities; additional demands on government services; increased and costly demands on rural industries; degradation of the local environment, which can have flow-on effects for communities and businesses; and loss of culture and identity within communities.

Land use conflict can be costly in its effects on individuals and the community. It is desirable to manage conflict before negative effects occur.

Managing land use conflict before it becomes a negative influence on individuals and the community is desirable. The benefits of dealing with land use conflict are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Benefits of dealing with the potential for land use conflict

Social
• Protection of amenity to individuals and the community; maintenance of well-being • Recognition of the rights and needs of individuals to a healthy and safe environment • Reducing stress which could result from continual exposure to impacts, financial insecurity, legal costs associated with any legal action including payment of fines • Protection of cultural heritage and community identity • Protection of landscapes and ecosystems valued by community
• Protection of natural resources including agricultural land and extractive resources • Preventing costs involved in nuisance or environmental mitigation measures • Avoiding lost productivity caused by additional operating limits and time taken to address conflict issues • Avoiding costs associated with legal challenges and/or enforcement action by regulatory authorities • Availability of employment • Maintenance of land and property values • Reduced need for monitoring, handling of complaints, enforcement and mediation • Avoiding costs associated with environmental remediation and maintenance of resource quality such as cost of treatment of potable water supply
• Environmental protection – healthy and productive catchments • Retention of local biodiversity and ecological systems • Soil conservation • Protection of water quality • Retention and maintenance of riparian vegetation

Quantifying rural land use conflict issues

State of the Environment (SoE) reports are the main documents for recording and monitoring environmental issues, including complaints and land use conflict at the local level. Local government is required to complete a comprehensive SoE report each four years. Annual summaries provide brief updates on major issues and changes.

Each of the local SoE reports for the twelve local government areas of the north coast were reviewed by the Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authority to establish a benchmark which could be used to measure progress in achieving the land use conflict target of the Northern Rivers Catchment Action plan. The review found that while there is evidence of land use conflict and interface issues in the reports, they lacked specific information and data on rural land use conflict issues. In the interest of measuring progress and future benchmarking, it is highly desirable that SoE reports capture specific data on the state of land use conflict and interface issues.

In addition to local SoE reports, complaint data is captured centrally via the NSW State government's pollution and environment line. Complaints and calls recorded are grouped into categories such as air quality, chemicals, noise, threatened species,

pesticides, cultural heritage and water issues. Grouping complaints into these categories allows longer term trends to be identified although this is limited by the fact that data about both urban and rural issues are captured.

Context for the handbook

This handbook complements the Far North Coast Strategy and Draft Mid North Coast Regional Strategy, the Northern Rivers Catchment Action Plan and the new local environmental plan preparation process, all of which deal with issues to do with land use, managing the interface issues between competing and differing land uses and managing land use conflict between uses of resources.

Further information

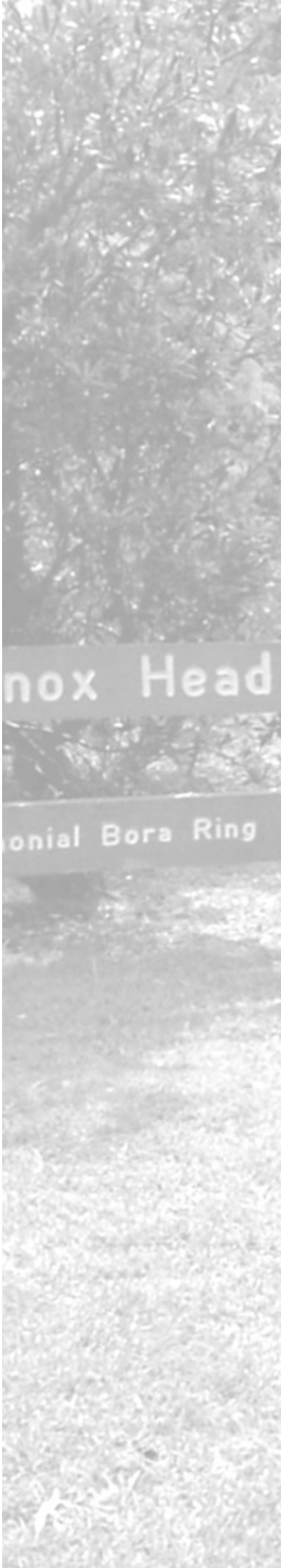
Publications

- *Does the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (NSW) or right to farm legislation provide a solution to the issue of rural land use conflict?* McNeil, H. 12 LGLJ 98 (2006)
- *Draft Mid North Coast Regional Strategy 2006* © State of NSW through Department of Planning, December 2006 www.planning.nsw.gov.au
- *Far North Coast Regional Strategy 2006–31* © State of NSW through Department of Planning, December 2006 www.planning.nsw.gov.au
- *Land Use Conflict – Review of Management Techniques, Planning NSW*. Smith, R.J. (2003)
- *Northern Rivers Catchment Action Plan,* Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authority 2007 www.northern.cma.nsw.gov.au

Note: Local and regional libraries may provide another useful source for obtaining information on this topic including local contacts and specific information relevant to the area.

Contacts

- Local government www.dlg.nsw.gov.au
- Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authority www.northern.cma.nsw.gov.au
- Northern Rivers Regional Development Board www.investnorthernrivers.com.au
- NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change www.environment.nsw.gov.au
- NSW Department of Planning www.planning.nsw.gov.au
- NSW Department of Primary Industries www.dpi.nsw.gov.au
- NSW Department of Water and Energy www.dwe.nsw.gov.au



CHAPTER 2

Living in a rural area

Snapshot

This chapter is aimed at people who are looking at buying a rural property or those thinking of living in a rural area, and those who advise them e.g. real estate agents. It is also a useful reference for farmers, land managers, and local and State government agencies and advisers when dealing with conflict issues.

It highlights the importance of sound land management in avoiding and resolving rural land use conflict at the neighbourhood and local level. We give you some ideas to help you enjoy your rural block and introduce you to some of your rights and social responsibilities in conducting your day-to-day activities, especially to do with acting within the law and getting on with your neighbours. Remember, it is only a beginner's guide so is not in any way comprehensive. Sources of more information are listed at the end of this chapter. Make sure you research your purchase thoroughly before you sign on the dotted line.

Topics covered in this chapter include:

- *useful tips for buying a small holding in the country*
- *practical issues to consider when buying a rural property, e.g. remoteness, access to services, climate, current agricultural activities and future land use*
- *legislative issues such as land zoning, the Section 149 Certificates and agencies responsible for planning and land use*
- *consideration to issues such as the impact of future land use and the nature of the neighbour's activities when purchasing a property*

Importantly, this chapter stresses positive ways of communicating with your neighbours. If an issue with the potential to cause conflict arises, litigation should always be seen as the last means of resolving this conflict.

This chapter does not cover technical issues to do with farming, e.g. how you will farm, establish an orchard or plan out your block. The Further Information section at the end of this chapter points you in the direction of organisations to contact. It also includes references for different aspects of property management as well as some further ideas on good neighbour practice. Chapter 4 also describes common causes of land use conflict and gives a 'potted guide' to legislation you will need to be familiar with to conduct certain activities and potentially reduce conflict through knowledge of the law.

Planning to buy a rural property?

So, you are planning to buy a rural block on the north coast of NSW. This decision may have been prompted through personal or economic motives, hopefully after much thought and consideration with 'significant others'. You may wish to simply enjoy the easygoing lifestyle of the region, the subtropical environment, be involved in a small agribusiness or undertake a more traditional farming enterprise. Whatever the reason, you will still need to manage your block with due care and responsibility not only towards the environment but also towards others, including your neighbours. By doing this you will help to maintain the quality of life that makes the north coast such a desirable place to live.

It's important to manage your property with due care and responsibility both to the environment and the community, especially your neighbours.

Lack of knowledge of people's rights and responsibilities in caring for the land, including duty of care for others, can be a major source of disharmony between neighbours. This can include ignorance of legislation as it applies to laws governing the land and not knowing who to contact to help resolve an issue, leading to frustration, mistrust and, at times, misplaced aggression.

The laws that govern land use are complex and varied. Responsible land owners try and keep up with laws that apply by contacting relevant organisations, reading, asking questions and using the internet.

The Landcare ethic is strongly implied throughout this handbook; it advocates that caring for the land and its people is an essential element of enjoying the richness that the region has to offer. Working with the local community for the common good is a key philosophy inherent in this chapter.

Buying a rural property

Let's get started

Choosing a property is largely a matter of the heart and, unfortunately, the "head thing" may come much later. By standing back and doing your research first you'll be better armed to make an informed decision and not have any regrets about your move to the 'idyllic life'.

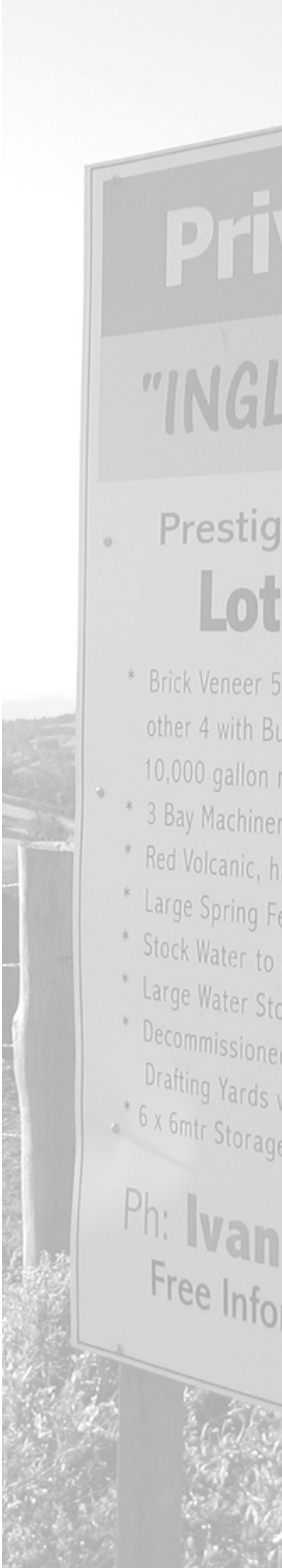
Many conflicts can be headed off at the pass by considering some basic requirements before you buy your dream block. It is important to realise that in moving into a rural area you will find routine activities you may be unfamiliar with and may cause you concern. These can include things such as tractor noise, burning off, stock management procedures, dust, land clearing, chemical application, harvesting and cultivation activities.

Conflict, either with neighbours or authorities, often results from people not understanding the environment they are moving into or arriving with preconceived ideas not based on the realities of rural life

So here are some suggestions that may help you maximise your enjoyment of the north coast lifestyle. They may appear to be plain common sense but often they are overlooked by intending buyers caught up in the excitement of searching for and buying a new property.

Heart versus head – how can I avoid a personal and financial disaster?

Here is one approach that you can adopt. Find a quiet space, sit down and think about your personal goals relating to living the rural lifestyle and how you will achieve them. This may include drawing up a wish list of what you want from your block and why you wish to buy rural land in the first place. If you have a family or partner, include them in this exercise. It is



essential to avoid an important source of disharmony at the family level by identifying and accommodating the desires and wishes of others in this important decision.

Now comes the most important step of reviewing the list in terms of your motivation to live in the country. List your goals and then place your requirements and limitations in two separate columns. Include financial limitations, employment opportunities, your state of health; education facilities, transport, and your knowledge of and expertise in managing the land. Table 3 illustrates some typical goals, desires and limitations for people moving to a block in the country.

Table 3: Example of a rural property wish list

My goals are	I would like to have	My limitations are
1. Work three days a week, including the capacity to relax	• Suitable and well paid part time employment commensurate with skills • Property close to major settlements • Opportunity to work from home • Easy care block	• Availability of suitable well paid part time employment options • Long travel time to major settlements • Internet and communication access • High maintenance block requiring weed eradication, fencing and clearing • Spouse needs to work to supplement income • Lack of time to enjoy leisure and lifestyle activities
2. Be self sufficient in terms of power, water and food	• Solar to meet all energy needs • Adequate water supply from rain water tanks, bores, dams and access to stream • Fertile soils in a frost free environment • Establish a small orchard and vegetable garden • Sell organic produce at farmers markets	• Cost and limitations of solar power such as enough capacity to weld, cook, run a washing machine, power a waste water management system. • Lack of available water in dry periods, inadequate tanks, poor water quality • No water licence for commercial purposes • Limited knowledge of horticultural practices • Lack of viable, fertile land • Frosts • Need to spray to control weeds and pests • Poorly maintained fences to exclude stock • Your health and that of others
3. Fewer neighbours, peace and quiet	• Property suitably located from the activities of other land owners • Tranquil bush setting	• Usually a long way into town requiring a good road, reliable car, increased petrol costs • Family needs: proximity to schools, sporting facilities, shops, medical care and relations • Nearby seasonal agricultural activities including harvesting, stock movement, ploughing, processing • Proposed new development area

cont./10

Table 3 cont.

4. Large home to accommodate all of our needs	• Old rural homestead with five bedrooms • Swimming pool • Sheds	• Initial purchase price – limited by tight budget • Maintenance, cost of renovation including travel, available tradespersons prepared to travel
5. Hobbies and recreation	• Pets, including horses	• Adequate and appropriate fencing to control animals • Lack of animal husbandry skills • Adequate feed and area to raise a horse

Once you have completed your list you should now have determined your motivation, whether you really wish to live in the country, and some specific requirements for your future purchase in order to meet your goals. You will also be more aware of your own situation, and have determined the direction in which you, your partner or your family, wish to head.

What's next? How do I find the location and the property that will best match my needs?

Before you buy a property get to know your region. Maps, guides, talking to the locals including real estate agents are all good sources of information.

By this stage you should now know approximately where on the NSW north coast you wish to live, how big a block you require, the activities you wish to conduct, your financial limitations, and the needs, personal and otherwise, of all those concerned with the decision. You have just taken the first step in creating harmony by sorting out your needs and those of significant others. Mutual agreement at the personal and family level on what you all want can prevent friction in the future, both at home and indirectly with the neighbours.

To get better acquainted with the district or region, and to find some potential and desirable localities, you will need to source maps and guides. Especially useful are topographical maps which show details of settlements, roads, gullies, creeks, mountains and administrative boundaries. Tourist information centres, the web – including Google Earth – are other sources of useful information.

Now comes the next step of finding the right property for you and your family.

Market analysis

Everywhere there seems to be the perfect purchase, often for a range of different reasons. How do you narrow this down so you can compare purchase prices and best approximate what you get for your dollar?

This brings us to the stage we call the market analysis. This may seem like a frightening option, the province of marketing gurus with large expense accounts. However, it can be

simple. All it means is taking the time to do some research. Get on the web, look through the region's real estate ads, e.g. www.realestate.com.au, www.domain.com.au, and www.sellwithoutagents.com.au, are useful starting points. Review local real estate literature and sales research data. This will give you a more informed view as to what is about and what you are going to need to spend on a property that best matches your wish list.

Any professional real estate agency should be able to help you with the necessary data and feedback on current market activity. Market analysis will further narrow down the locations where your dream maybe realised financially and where capital growth may occur. It will also give you an indication of what activities can be carried out on adjoining blocks and the nature of agriculture and lifestyle activities in the locality you are looking at.

Planning policy

Are there any plans by State or local government that might change the nature of the area where your dream property is located? Check out the relevant regional plans and strategies which guide future planning and development. There are two regional strategies for the north coast: the *Far North Coast Regional Strategy* and the *Draft Mid North Coast Regional Strategy*. They include maps showing future urban growth areas. The local environmental plan is a key reference to check at Council as this shows the land zones for each local government area. There may also be a rural residential strategy and urban growth strategy that has been prepared by Council showing where future settlement and development is planned. Find out what are the plans for development in the locality you are interested.

It's a good idea to consult the Department of Planning website (www.planning.nsw.gov.au) for planned major projects as well as other government agency websites to get a handle on where new developments are proposed. Consultation with the local council may prove very valuable and don't forget to find out where future roads, highways and infrastructure are planned. There is an overview of the planning system in Chapter 5. The *Further Information* section at the end of this chapter has references to assist your research.

The drive by

You've been busy with your research so now you have a fair idea of price, what you can afford, where you want to live, as well as a knowledge of current infrastructure; services, amenities and an indication of where the productive land may be. You should have also identified any limitations and threats to your proposed purchase such as encroaching development and your financial capacity.

So now it's out into the car to start looking at some of those locations that have been identified in your research. Here the *Property inspection check list* at the end of this chapter may serve as a guide as to what factors you will be looking for (amenity to services, good road, property size, condition of fences, level of weed infestation, arable land, agricultural activity, and lifestyle possibilities). Look for the for sale/auction signs. What agent seems to be the most popular? What condition are the signs in (a faded sign can be a giveaway as to how long a property has been on the market) and where does there seem to be the most activity in terms of available properties.

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