

[REDACTED]

To Whom It May Concern: Submission to Local Government Rating System Review

This submission is made by owners of “Burrabungle”, a Trust for Nature covenanted property on the lower slopes of Mt Korong in the North Central region of Victoria, Loddon Shire (Property number 63902900). We strongly support a review downwards of rates for properties such as ours.

Currently our rates are calculated on the basis of ‘Rural Production’. While our property does include a small olive grove and orchard (11.69ha) for private use and which are excluded from the TfN covenant, overall the land is dedicated to nature conservation only and no income is made from the property.

We are strongly of the view that there should be incentives for private individuals to take up land-ownership/stewardship as a nature conservation practice. Just as farmers receive tax and other incentives to produce food so, in view of a general privatisation of ecological work and the rapidly evolving climate crisis, private conservationists need support and recognition for what they contribute to climate change mitigation and protection of biodiversity. In view of the need to improve fairness and equity in the rating system we also note that our neighbouring City of Greater Bendigo provides a 100% rebate for Trust for Nature properties, and that other Australian states offer a blanket exemption to in-perpetuity conservation covenants (see for example NSWs’ Local Government Act s 555 (1) (b2)).

Trust for Nature covenantors already contribute significantly and voluntarily to the public good through their voluntary work on the ground and in raising ecological awareness within the community. Owners of “Burrabungle” also contribute to conservation practices as members of Mt Korong Eco Watch Association, and as volunteers for weed and pest control works within the Mt Korong Nature Conservation Reserve (NCR). All of these works, including erosion control, re-vegetation, pest and weed mitigation and surveillance, establishment of nest boxes, and ecological research, maintain the area as a significant public asset where

endangered or threatened species are protected and where recovery from historical land-degrading farming practices can take place.

As an entity and as individuals experiencing and appreciating the non-monetary value of ecological practice and land stewardship we are keen to encourage others to take up this vital responsibility. The question of rates and an equitable approach *vis à vis* commercial enterprise will be a significant incentive to others and will represent a systematic expression of local government recognition of and commitment to caring for country.

