

# Farmers the focus of Tamar research

By ELLENA MIDGLEY

FIELD trials of the Tamar Sustainability Index will take place over the next few weeks and could lead to market-based trading and investment in a variety of natural resource management outcomes in the Tamar region.

The Tamar NRM has formed a partnership with CSIRO to develop a sustainability index to calculate the value of environmental stewardship services that farmers and other landholders are providing in the Tamar region and will be trialled on 20 properties during the next month.

Tamar NRM chairman Ian Sauer said Australian farmers spent \$3.3 billion a year on natural resource management and planted more than 20 million trees each year for conservation purposes.

"The primary industries sector has reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by 40 per cent over the last 15 years," he said.

"This is why it is important to be able to measure the economic benefits of environmental services such as weed and pest removal, improved soil and water

quality, land rehabilitation and increased biodiversity."

Mr Sauer said if the community and governments wanted more it was important to know how they valued such services.

He said once a value was put on the services, ways to recognise farmers' efforts and encourage more services could be developed.

A team of scientists from CSIRO and Tamar NRM officers began visiting properties this week.

"This is a fantastic opportunity for local farmers to work with CSIRO and Tamar NRM to see how well the TSI works in a practical real life farming situation," he said.

"This may be one of the solutions we have been looking for in finding better ways to encourage farmers and other landholders to spend more time on natural resource management issues whilst still maintaining a viable business."

Successful trials could open the door to market-based trading mechanisms such as auctions, offset schemes and other forms of stewardship payments to farmers on a more robust, scientific and economic basis, he said.