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VIC

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PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION
NATIVE VEGETATION INQUIRY

AS AN OWNER/MANAGER OF 2 PROPERTIES CONTAINING MOSTLY NATIVE VEGETATION (ONE IN QUEENSLAND & ONE IN VICTORIA), THAT DO NOT GENERATE ANY INCOME I SUBMIT THE FOLLOWING COMMENTS IN REGARD TO ISSUES RELEVANT TO THIS INQUIRY;

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EXISTING REGIMES IN VARIOUS STATES IS QUESTIONABLE; FOR EXAMPLE, IN VICTORIA THE PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT ACT 1987, ESTABLISHES N.V.R.C.'S THAT ALLOW PERMITS TO BE ISSUED "DESIGNED TO FACILITATE NORMAL RURAL PRACTISES", BUT THE FLORA & FAUNA GUARANTEE ACT 1988, WAS INTRODUCED TO GUARANTEE THAT VICTORIA'S FLORA&FAUNA CAN " SURVIVE, FLOURISHIN THE WILD". THESE TWO ACTS ARE INCONSISTENT AND CONTRADICT EACH OTHER. WHAT ARE "NORMAL" RURAL PRACTICES – AS THEY WERE IN THE 1880'S?

IN QLD; I HAD NO EXPERIENCE OF THE EFFECT OF CURRENT REGIMES, BUT BEFORE I LEFT IN 1995, THE WORD WAS IF YOU WANTED TO CLEAR YOUR BLOCK, YOU HAD BETTER DO IT NOW! WORLD WILDLIFE FUND'S LATEST MAGAZINE QUOTES AN AVERAGE OF 446,000 HECTARES CLEARED ANNUALLY BETWEEN 1997&1999.TODAY I RANG MY LOCAL COUNCIL IN QLD; TO FIND OUT IF A PERMIT TO CLEAR NATIVE VEGETATION WAS NEEDED AND WAS INFORMED THAT I WOULD HAVE TO CONTACT THE D.P.I. – IT WOULD APPEAR THIS COUNCIL HAS NO PLANNING OR ENVIRONMENTAL DEPARTMENTS. A LOCAL BULLDOZING CONTRACTOR WAS ACTUALLY MORE INFORMATIVE THAN THE LOCAL COUNCIL AND ADVISED THAT THE DEPT; OF NATURAL RESOURCES & MINES WAS THE RESPONSIBLE AUTHORITY THAT REGULATES THE CLEARING OF NATIVE VEGETATION.

BROADACRE AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES ARE NOW GENERALLY RECOGNISED AS UNSUSTAINABLE BECAUSE OF THE PROBLEMS THEY CAUSE (E.G. LOSS OF TOPSOIL, SALINITY ETC;) AND WHOLE FARM PLANNING INCORPORATING BIODIVERSITY IS PROVING TO

BE PARTIAL SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM AND TO CONTRIBUTE TO AN INCREASE IN PRODUCTIVITY. IN ADDRESSING THE ISSUE OF SUSTAINABILITY, THE FOCUS SHOULD BE ENTIRELY TOWARDS THE REHABILITATION OF ALREADY DEGRADED AGRICULTURAL LAND, NOT THE CLEARING OF MORE NATIVE VEGETATION TO ACHIEVE SUITABLE PRODUCTIVITY. REVEGETATED LAND WILL NEVER BE EQUIVALENT TO NATURAL BUSHLAND. WITH THE CLEARING OF BUSHLAND, NOT ONLY IS THE TOPSOIL DISPLACED, BUT THE MYRIAD OF TERRESTRIAL HERBS, ORCHIDS AND SUBTERRAINIAN FUNGI ARE GENERALLY OBLITERATED. ARE THE RECOGNISED THOUSANDS OF SPECIES OF FUNGI, MOSTLY AS YET UNDESCRIBED, AND THEIR CHEMICAL PROPERTIES TO BE WASTED? AIMING FOR AN INCREASE IN BIODIVERSITY IN AN AGE WHERE OLD SINGULAR SPECIES ARE BEING DIVIDED INTO AND RECOGNISED AS MORE THAN ONE, AND NEW SPECIES ARE STILL BEING DISCOVERED, DICTATES THAT THE CLEARING OF NATIVE VEGETATION MUST STOP. THE MITIGATION FOR THE REMOVAL OF NATIVE VEGETATION, CURRENTLY IN PLACE IN VICTORIA IS NOT NECESSARILY A SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM AND THE QUESTION NEEDS TO BE ASKED; WILL 400 SEEDLINGS EVER OBTAIN THE HABITAT STATUS OF A 180 YEAR OLD EUCALYPT?

EDUCATION PROGRAMS, MORE INCENTIVES AND COMPENSATION PACKAGES MAY HELP TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM OF PRIMARY PRODUCER'S CURRENT, SOMETIMES NEGATIVE, FEELING VICTIMISED, ATTITUDES. E.G. PEOPLE COULD BE MADE AWARE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL STATUS OF THEIR PROPERTIES WITH THEIR RATE NOTICES AND THE VARIOUS AVENUES THEY HAVE TO ACCESS GOVERNMENT INFORMATION ETC; IT'S TIME THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR GAVE SOMETHING BACK TO THE ENVIRONMENT, RATHER THAN CONSTANTLY TAKING FROM IT AND TO ACHIEVE THIS THE CURRENT "US & THEM" ATTITUDE NEEDS TO BE OVERCOME.

COSTS IN MANAGING MY NATIVE VEGETATION (EXCLUDING COUNCIL RATES) HAVE MOSTLY INVOLVED THE REMOVAL OF EXOTIC WEEDS. REIMBURSEMENT OF THESE COST HAS BEEN ACCESSED THROUGH LOCAL AND STATE GOVERNMENT STRATEGIES. THE VICTORIAN GOVT; BUSH TENDER TRIALS UNFORTUNATELY ALLOW FOR BIAS ON THE PART OF THE ASSESSOR IN HIS "VALUATION" OF A PARTICULAR PIECE OF BUSH.

LACK OF CONSISTENCY AND COMMUNICATION BETWEEN LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT, THEIR DEPARTMENTS & EMPLOYEES, COMBINED WITH A “WHO HAS THE AUTHORITY TO DO WHAT?”, OR “WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT?” APPROACH, ARE NOT ONLY AN OBVIOUS WASTE OF HUMAN RESOURCES, BUT IMPEDE ANY REGIMES’ DEGREE OF EFFECTIVENESS.

HAVING RECENTLY BECOME A MEMBER OF A “REGIONAL COMMITTEE”, I AM NOT YET IN A POSITION TO COMMENT ON THEIR EFFECTIVENESS, BUT THEIR AIMS OF PUTTING EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES IN PLACE MAYBE A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.

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