

A Submission to the productivity Commission Inquiry  
into the Impacts of Native Vegetation and Biodiversity  
Regulations

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This inquiry was not adequately publicised.

As a consequence those who should have been consulted will most likely not be consulted.

Upon learning something was afoot I wrote to the local Federal member and to the Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson. The local members office had no more idea of what was going on than I. The Deputy Prime Minister, at the time of writing was still dealing with my inquiry!

The Commission needs to be aware that people such as us, reduced to poverty by the South Australian native Vegetation Act, cannot afford newspapers and rely upon hand outs from friends and neighbors.

The poor in Australia, and in particular, the rural poor are becoming increasingly disenfranchised from the rest of society and the cryptic evolution of this inquiry illustrates that it is not by accident that this is coming about.

It should be obvious to all that this inquiry should be consulting, as priority, those of us who have had our lives destroyed financially and emotionally by draconian, ideologically propelled land use restrictions with no counter-balancing compensations. What effort, one might ask, has been put into obtaining the viewpoint of scrub block farmers driven from farming during the last twenty years by evil law such as South Australia's Native Vegetation Act?

The concept of retaining native vegetation is sound but this should not be achieved by the theft, deception, intimidation and blackmail which characterises the administration of the unjust and inequitable South Australian Native Vegetation Act.

What occurred in South Australia was a classic example of the hi-jack of a good idea by a gang of ideologically driven zealots.

The South Australian administration pushed through a regime based upon theft (with menace) secretively and in spite of the obvious deleterious impact guaranteed upon rural communities and individual rights!

It could be suspected that people who draft laws such as South Australia's Native Vegetation Act and those who allow them to pass into law are not normal people, or ignore the mores of normal people, and the rest of society should be protected from them.

One comes to understand two things more clearly from experience with legislation such as that introduced by South Australia-

1. Why a person can be driven to such a state of despair that the drop, on the end of a rope tied to the big rafter in the implement shed, seems a reasonable response to a world in which lunacy prevails.
2. Why people such as terrorists, can develop such a level of hatred that they are prepared to sacrifice their own lives in an endeavor to maximise the hurt inflicted on a perceived amoral, unjust and arrogant section of mankind.

The tragedy is that laws such as the South Australian Native Vegetation Act engender nothing but contempt from those people they seek to manage. In the long term the laws will prove counter-productive because if for some reason, political upheaval, civil unrest or catastrophic natural event these unjust laws become unenforceable land owners will seize the opportunity to clear every stick of vegetation! Not because they might, particularly want to. Not because they think its necessarily the right thing to do. They will do it out of a pent-up, frustrated sense of outrage at intolerable injustice that has been manifested upon them and their families.

Those not willing to believe me have never been treated the way my family and other scrub block battlers have been treated. They have not had to watch their children suffer deprivation and poverty because of willful, malevolent government action. They have not suffered decline in health and not watched the health of their family decline due to stress, anxiety and poverty the result of actions by governments and bureaucracies seemingly driven by an ingrained, incestuous culture of hatred and spite.

It is clear to anybody who cares to look that the biosphere of planet earth is about to undergo dramatic change.

The Green Movement can see this and like the occupants of a sinking boat are in an advanced state of panic. This panic has upset their moral judgement and now the stranger of the boats occupants (green tinged urbanites) are throwing the weaker (scrub block battles and the poor, generally) over the side. Sickeningly, once they have us drowning they chop at our fingers as we cling to the side of the boat.

Things may, however, become very interesting if some of us are able to clamber back aboard and ourselves take up arms!

In the tide of human affairs the pendulum swings back and forth and having reached its zenith on one side will always return to the opposite position. Thus, it is most unwise to make enemies while the pendulum appears to favour your view of the world!

In their zeal to protect animals, legislators have begun to behave like animals.

It should not be forgotten that the level of civilization reached by a society is measured by the distance it has moved from Darwinism!

This Submission will now more specifically deal with some of the issues under headings used in the Issues Paper.

And what a veritable can of worms we have, clear evidence of the indecent haste, indeed panic, perhaps even spiteful agenda, which has characterised much of the poorly considered legislation which afflicts those unfortunates with native vegetation on their land.

### Negative impacts

Even the most “simple” person would understand that if you deprive people of the right to use their legally purchased assets to earn a living (as the South Australian Government has done) then those people will not be able to earn a living and will, as a direct consequence, exist in a state of poverty! An expensive inquiry should not be necessary to demonstrate this obvious fact.

People with native vegetation on their farms are penalized. The more native vegetation they have the more they are penalized.  
What lunacy!

In 1982 we purchased in good faith a “developmental” farming property. Our bank, stock firm and others who advised us were happy that the farm was potentially viable. We were offered finance for purchase and development. When further development was stopped by legislation, introduced by stealth and without consultation, it became clearer that we would be permitted to cultivate 25% only of our properties total potential arable area.

As a consequence the banks and stock firms lost all interest in us as we were deemed to be “not potentially viable.”

Two bank managers and two rural counsellors suggested we sell what little cleared land we had to neighbors and leave farming!

We do not accept that people should be driven from their homes by government malevolence. Clearly, the more government gets away with the more it will attempt to get away with. I think we have witnessed enough from our experience to justify us holding the view that the South Australian legislative processes are amoral.

Today we exist in severe poverty on a farm we are not permitted to farm properly due entirely to ruthless, misguided legislative “bastardry.”

A nearby farm of similar size to ours but cleared prior to the introduction of anti-clearing laws produces \$300,000 to \$380,000 gross income in a good year. In a good year our farm grosses \$15,000 to \$30,000 a figure which includes social welfare payments!

One wonders how there could be a more obvious and more blatant, case of injustice and discrimination than the South Australian Native Vegetation Act which denies a farming family use of 75% of their property while denying their neighbors the use of 8%.

On top of the staggering depression of farm income, money borrowed for farm purchase still must be found.

We worked off farm and used whatever social security money we were entitled to. For some periods we were actually servicing a debt, on a farm that the South Australian government was ensuring we could not profitably operate with social security money! Small wonder we live below the poverty line!



It is clear the South Australian administration does not care. No communication took place to ascertain if we were going to cope with such restriction on our capacity to earn an income.

Our children had to wait in the car after school while we worked at off farm jobs and were often too tired to eat when we finally arrived back on our farm late in the evening.

Australia ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to Adequate Income but the South Australian government does not think this should apply to our children.

The negative impact on our farm income will be of a perpetual nature.

A farm nearby of similar size and topography has arable areas cleared. This farm supports two families. While we live in poverty they do very well. It is easy to see why when one is aware that for every acre we can crop they can crop twenty; for every cow we can run they run eighty; for every sheep we can run they run five. Of course, they have greatly enhanced economy of scale advantages.

They are considered “viable” and are able to access overdraft facility of \$80,000.

Our bank does not want us to have an overdraft because we are now considered “not potentially viable”. Incidentally we have been considered “not potentially viable” for the past twenty years; the time we have been stopped from proceeding with our development programme.

Our farm was not cleared at the rate of neighboring farms and still had much regrowth at the time clearing restrictions were introduced because:-

- although of the same size as neighboring farms it was operated by one family whereas for some time at least other farms were operated by two or more related families;
- clearing was of a more drawn out nature as partly cleared land was used as sheep pasture;
- there was more sickness and a major car accident which interrupted the programme;
- there was more emphasis placed on sheep and sidelines such as lime and charcoal production and pig farming;
- ironically, people with an interest in natural history were involved and there was an early genuine effort to cater for biodiversity preservation;
- a more organic, no chemicals, less super phosphate approach to farming was used.

The increase in the value of our land at the completion of our clearing programme would have roughly equalled the cost of clearing. The profits from crops grown on the progressively cleared land would have financed the operation.

Our experience is that our uncleared land attracts rubbish dumpers, wood collectors (a chronic problem) shooters and illicit drug growers. At times water for drug growing is sourced from our own pipelines where they pass through scrubland.

From time to time we involve police, and then of course, it is necessary for us to assist them in their investigations. The police are highly paid for their time and effort. We receive nothing but interruption to our unrewarded but busy work life.

Our farm had good fences when we purchased it and its price reflected this fact. That we cannot now maintain these fences due to lack of income (particularly, loss of income from not being able to graze partly cleared land) means that the value of our farm tied to fence condition is decreasing.

I believe that current draconian legislation will be responsible for premature deaths among land owners, the result of anxiety, stress, depression and poverty. In many ways its not unlike the well recognised syndrome common among aboriginal Australians.

I believe my own life will be shortened similarly, a prognosis with which two separate Doctors are not inclined to disagree.

### Positive Impacts on landholders

Somebody is joking, surely!

If there is any redeeming features to our experience with South Australia's Native Vegetation Act it is that we and our children now know to never trust governments politicians or public servants!

And, we have had strongly reinforced the perception that governments and beaurocracies are not the least concerned with the impact of their policies on the individual family.

As can be seen the positive impact on us was "education"!

### Impact on property values

Anti-clearing legislation has had a dramatic negative impact on the value of our land.

The 75% of our land which we have been forced to allow to regrow, is today, valued at less the one tenth of the value of the land we are permitted to cultivate and 25% of the value if held in its partly cleared state.

When we purchased our farm we paid for potential use; an option which has been taken from us without compensation.

With time the useable land is increasing in value while the regrowth country we can no longer cultivate is moving in the other direction. Moreover, the land we are permitted to cultivate can be made more valuable by inputs such as stone rolling, fertilizing and fencing paid for by income generated by its use.

The scrub country we can no longer cultivate provides negligible income and would create no profit at all if we were to carry out the desired level of weed and feral animal control.

Who would want to buy a farm where 25% of land is all that can be used to generate income, most of which has then to be used to cover management costs incurred by the remaining 75% of weed and vermin infested scrub.

#### Administrative costs for landowners

We see legislation coming in requiring a permit to do anything. As pointed out earlier the legislation creates poverty which ensures that the now impoverished landowner is unable to afford the expensive “application fee” required to be paid up front before the question of a permit will be considered.

#### Government measures to mitigate negative impacts

You’re joking again! You really are funny buggers! In South Australia farmers talk of a form of blackmail used to force landowners to place native vegetation in “heritage tenure”.

One neighbor wishing to subdivide was told it would not be possible unless he placed scrub on the property under “heritage”.

South Australia’s heritage wares are becoming “mill stones” around the necks of those unfortunate to be saddled with them.

### Impacts on non-landholders and regional communities

The restrictions on farming placed upon our use of our farm by the South Australian legislation has reduced our farm in-put spending in the local community by \$80,000 to \$150,000 each year.

We are no longer able to afford to employ shearers, shed hands, farm laborers or tradesmen. We and our children do not participate in local sport or social activities because we can no longer afford the car running costs involved.

We are dependent upon social security when we should be taxpayers. Money used to support us is money not available for other important and socially desirable projects.

### Efficiency and effectiveness of environmental regimes

The cause of conservation will not be served by legislation that either by design or accident further impoverishes the poor!

It is very clear that this is the outcome of South Australian legislation.

### Perverse environmental outcomes

We are expected to manage an area of scrubland on our farm, which is larger than some National Parks from a disposable income less than that of an urban dweller on Social Security benefits!

Yet, rural people know only too well that conservation parks with manifestly better provisional budgets are fire hazards, abounding in vermin and weeds. How can one expect other than perverse environmental outcomes?

### Adequacy of assessments of economic and social impacts

Our family have suffered crippling economic, social, health and mental trauma, the direct result of South Australia's draconian and unjust legislation.

If any assessments of these impacts were made it was certainly without consultation with us, nor with anybody else to our knowledge.



### Transparency and community consultation

Here we go again. Another of your cartoon sections! Scrub block owners saw no transparency or community consultation prior to the implementation of anti-clearing laws in South Australia.

I have been told, after the event, that some people in South Australia's conservation movement knew what was going on so I suspect any consultation was both selective and secretive.

### Options to reduce adverse impacts of environmental regimes

It is just not acceptable to suggest that when the viability (whatever "viability" means) of a property is seriously eroded by legislation that the property should be purchased by the government.

Nor is it acceptable that farmland be confiscated in cases where farmers are so heavily fined for some breach of a man-made law they are unable to pay the fine.

Both the above cases represent serious breaches of what should be a fundamental respect by society for the members of that society as individuals.

A farm, or in fact any home, should be considered sacrosanct in any moral and just society. It must not be forgotten that a home is home to more than the individual being persecuted under man-made laws (which by their very origin are most likely perverse and corrupt) and innocent victims will be made of spouses and children.

Why should financial incentives be directed only towards land put into perpetual covenant or heritage agreement? There should be assistance and incentives provided when land use options are down – graded by legislation.

Conservation is a social and cultural issue. It is not, and should not, be made a criminal issue as various governments seem intent on trying to make it.

In Australian politics there are clear signs of development of a political vendetta against farmers and people in general, who make their living from the land. Apparently, it is perceived that there is some political capital to be gained by demonizing rural dwellers. The current crop of amoral, draconian Acts and Regulations reflects this.

For conservation to succeed people must practice conservation because they want to!

Legal constraints on individuals that we see today exist only because one part of society is stronger than the others.

Law and order is not constant. Look at history. Look at many parts of the world today.

That which is constant exists within the hearts and minds of people. Examples might be the bond between parent and child, or religion. These are very strong forces in mankind and significantly they are not the result of man-made law, not even draconian man-made law!

I believe it should be easy for the Commission to see that the legislators who currently mis-use their undoubted power over us to create amoral man-made law do not understand nature, do not understand the nature of man and most significantly, do not understand the difference between right and wrong.

I appeal to the Productivity Commission to strongly recommend that all current Native Vegetation and Biodiversity Regulations be repealed and replaced with a more morally acceptable approach to a serious problem.

G. W. Anderson