

PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION July 11 03

In the early part of 1994 Oldfield Location 1320 situated about 35 KM North of Ravensthorpe came on the market. This block had been allocated about 1979, Under conditional purchase lease, this required the clearing of at least 50% of the block and at the time fencing and living on the block or nearby, the first lessee did very little clearing, and it was then sold to a city-based engineer, who did a small amount of the obligatory clearing.

On inspection, the Department of Land Administration found that there was not enough clearing to qualify for a Freehold title and to transfer to us we had to agree to finish clearing a part cleared section and then continue to clear the rest up to the amount required for Freehold Title. The first was carried out, and on August 16 1995 a Notice of Intent to Clear was sent to the Commissioner for Soil Conservation. This was then assessed by AGWA and local Land care people, all maps as required at the time were included and the proposal was commended as being friendly to the environment as we had not asked to clear much more than half of the piece of bush and agreed to reserve the rest.

Eventually after a long process lasting about two years, we were told that we could not clear the approx. 650 hectares we had applied for. This represented about half the total area. Quite clearly this area and more would have been cleared long before if it been in the hands of a genuine farmer. The cost of the operation would have been recouped in the first year which would have been 1996.

We have been offered approx. \$90.00 Hectare as *adjustment* this is not to be considered compensation we are told. When assessing these *notices of intent to clear* I do not think that any consideration was ever given to whether the block was likely to become nonviable or not, the game seemed to be *stop all clearing if possible*. There never was much if any community consultation, if there had been possibly some better results may have been obtained.

When one considers that land in this area is now selling at around \$500.00 Hectare, and that it is now 2003 and the area in question would have been producing crops and livestock all this time, the financial loss can be seen as it really is.

The Commissioner, I am told, under the act is supposed to offer alternatives where possible. Nothing was able to be negotiated such as high water use crops etc, as they said that we would forget after a few years and revert to the normal crop system.

During all this time many hectares have been cleared illegally albeit in small pieces and this was well known to the Commissioner I am sure, I understand the reason nothing was done about it was because they did not have the staff.

I believe that governments have the right and responsibility to see that the environment is properly looked after, however many farmers have done many thousands of dollars worth of land care work before clearing restrictions were introduced.

I consider that the WA government's introduction of clearing regulations was done in a totally unethical, immoral and probably illegal manner. One can only wonder how the WA politicians would feel if they were told that they could only build on a third of their house block and little compensation was going to be paid.

Full and just compensation should be paid to people who were stopped from clearing. Although spineless unprincipled WA politicians pass the buck, the federal Government, which seems to have the power, should step in and see that

compensation happens, they do not seem to be afraid to use this power in firearms buy backs radioactive waste dumps issues.

As a taxpayer I would expect and no doubt do, pay for *public good* actions wherever they happen, in areas other than the environment but do not see that we should bear almost all the cost of this *public good*.

T G Price on behalf of the Price Family Superfund.