

COUNCIL
of the
SHIRE OF CARDWELL

12 January 2004
Native Vegetation Inquiry
Productivity Commission
LB2, Collins Street East
MELBOURNE Vic 8003

**RE: 'DRAFT' REPORT INTO THE IMPACTS OF NATIVE VEGETATION
AND BIODIVERSITY REGULATIONS**

Cardwell Shire Council have previously submitted Notices of Motion to the NQLGA and LGAQ calling for the Federal Government to allocate funds to State Governments to provide compensation to land owners where the Vegetation Management Act 1999 has prevented land owners from using such land to its full agricultural potential. The motions were carried in their respective forums with both associations taking this matter 'on board' for further action.

The Vegetation Management Act 1999 was a requirement placed on the State of Queensland by the Federal Government and created retrospective legislation and in certain situations, has prevented land owners from fully utilizing freehold land for agricultural pursuits. A few years ago when the Federal Government decided Australia must severely restrict gun ownership, those owners forced to relinquish guns were compensated at market value. They were given a fair go. All Australians paid for the buy-back. If Australia needs to save land for its conservation value (and most farmers agree that it does) then all Australians should contribute to the cost. The Vegetation Management Act 1999 is unfair to farmers and is effectively retrospective legislation. Secure property rights are regarded as a must in all western democracies. This is one of the reasons those countries became rich, as Mr Anderson recently stated and property rights continue to be a prerequisite for long-term planning and investment. It seems that in many policy areas (eg. Environment) the State Governments are having to work within policy frameworks set by the Federal Government and neither the Federal Coalition nor the Opposition has been really listening to the concerns of country people for quite a few years. The Federal Government seems to be blaming the hole in the ozone layer almost exclusively on land clearing in Queensland. There is seldom mention of other significant pollutants like coal-fired power stations. It has been an economic reality for the past 30 years that farmers have had to plan ahead and expand to remain viable. The smart farmers did this.

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During good times they bought extra land (zoned Agricultural) as close as possible to the existing holding, even if they had to pay above market value prices and pay higher rates over the years to do so. Some of them are still paying off the investment in extra land. Many of these smart farmers were planning for their own superannuation. Now, some of them are expected to donate a significant proportion of their superannuation to the environment. Would politicians, bureaucrats and other workers be happy to do that? The Vegetation Management Act 1999 is just one of the many government policies creating difficulties for people living off the land.

It is common knowledge that in most areas within Australia, and in particular this region, country people are struggling to survive for one reason or another. With the continuing threat of banana imports into Australia and environmental and conservation issues weighing heavily on the future of cane farming, the long-term future for farmers within this Shire looks bleak. This situation is already having an adverse effect on the local economy and the livelihoods of the majority of residents living within the Shire who are employed either directly or indirectly within agricultural industries.

Diversification and environmentally friendly farm management practices are being promoted as the way of the future. This cannot and will not happen unless farmers have access to the 'freehold' lands in their possession so that they can plan for their futures, or alternatively, they are rightfully compensated.

Yours faithfully

MAL MALLYON
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER