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WA

Australian Government Productivity Commission  
Native Vegetation  
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Dear Commissioners

**IMPACTS OF NATIVE VEGETATION AND BIODIVERSITY REGULATIONS**  
*Productivity Commission Draft Report*

Having read the draft report, I make the following submission:

I believe that the report is an excellent document, however there are some matters which were in my original submission that I would like to emphasize.

Firstly, I believe that very little of Western Australia has been cleared. I note Table 1 **Native Vegetation by State and Territory, 1997** on page XXIV (Overview) indicates that 56% of Western Australia has remnant vegetation. In my original submission I suggested the figure is well in excess of 90%. I still believe this is the case as the figures quoted in the table include Pastoral Leases which are generally not cleared, and indeed can only be cleared if a permit is obtained which is usually granted for a very small proportion of the property. The map that I included in my original submission was a Government document that clearly indicated that Pastoral areas were uncleared.

There are many reasons why the community wishes to retain remnant vegetation. Clearly if the concern is “green house”, Western Australia is one of the least cleared land masses in the world, therefore restrictions are unnecessary.

Another reason that clearing is restricted is because of the risk of salinity. Clearing does not cause salinity, salt is sometimes in the soil profile and clearing the land of deep-rooted perennials can lead to a rise in the water table which brings the salinity to the surface. Trees generally do not use salt water; they use fresh water which may then lower the water table in the catchment, therefore the more trees the less fresh water remaining

If the community or the property owner wishes to lower the water table non-indigenous trees can often use more water than the indigenous varieties so the use of the most appropriate vegetation should be encouraged, not a blind promotion of native trees.

If the community or the property owner wishes to harvest fresh water, and there is little or no threat of salt, clearing of deep-rooted perennials is an advantage. The point I made in my original submission was the fact that much of the central coastal plain between Perth and Kalbarri is relatively free of salt so clearing could take place without a significant increase in salinity. Unfortunately Government agencies have been imposing severe

restrictions on development in this area which has enormous areas still uncleared. This matter has been raised by both the Gingin and Dandaragan Shires in their submissions.

This land-form (mainly sandy soils) is the water catchment area for the underground supply used by the Perth metropolitan area. It also supports a major horticultural industry which is handicapped by the difficulty in obtaining new and/or increased licenses as the authorities are concerned about over allocating resources. Clearly in this area Cowing further clearing would not only provide increased agricultural and horticultural production, but also a greatly improved resource for the Perth metropolitan area. Newly developed agricultural technologies make agriculture highly productive in this area, due to the introduction of deep-rooted perennials and modern fertilizers.

With regard to biodiversity I wish to re-emphasize that because of its naturally infertile soils, Western Australia's coastal plain has, great biodiversity. It is desirable that each species be retained and protected. Rare species may be best protected by re-location (as has been demonstrated at Kings Park), thereby allowing the development of a valuable agricultural or mineral resource. Biodiversity should not be seen as a virtue on its own as every hectare is slightly different to every other and this argument would frustrate any development of any sort, including residential. The object is to protect every species but not every mix of species.

Few industries are more environmentally friendly than the controlled logging of native forests (for all the previously stated reasons, as well as providing habitat for fauna). Western Australia's forests have been among the best managed in the world. The overthrow of the Regional Forest Agreement and the locking up of many areas of forest has lead to a major reduction in suitable milling timber. Timber plantations, both pines and eucalypts, have consumed huge areas of some of the State's best grazing and horticultural country.

As previously submitted, Western Australia in the Environment Protection Amendment Bill 2003 makes no provision for compensation to land-owners for losses suffered due to environmental restrictions. The Commission is also aware that all States and Territories have recently introduced similar legislation. The key question in my mind is whether the States and Territories have acted independently or have they responded to pressure from the Federal Government so as to conform with the Commonwealth's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999? The answer to this question determines to what extent land-owners are constitutionally entitled to compensation.

At this point in time the Western Australian Government has yet to introduce regulations for the EPA Amendment Act 2003, although there are drafts circulating for very limited public consultation. Restrictions on clearing and other land use controls have, Of course, been in force since June 2002. Equally alarming, the promised code of Practice (spelling out normal farm practices that are allowed) has not yet seen the light of day.

in conclusion, I commend the view spelt out in the draft report that emphasis must be focused on desirable environmental outcomes, rather than on the prevention of clearing native vegetation. What is required is a scientific, rather than an emotional, approach to the environment.

Yours sincerely

Murray Nixon