

Productivity Commission  
LB2 Collins Street East  
Melbourne Victoria 8003

10 July 2003

Federal Government Public Inquiry into the Impacts of Native Vegetation and Biodiversity Regulations.

I am a dry land mixed farmer and grazier in north west NSW, so only use water for stock and domestic use.

I consider the current disincentives that exist for ecologically sustainable land use in NSW are:-

**The Native Vegetation Conservation Act**

**The Threatened Species Act**

**The RACAC Process**

**The Wilderness Act**

My property covers 4900 acres of which 3 900 acres is arable, and the other 1000 acres consists of a 625 acre forest lease, heavily timbered, and the remainder being shelter belts, grassed rocky knobs and waterways.

The soil type varies from alluvial creek flat through shallow black rocky ridges and gravel, a considerable amount of red basalt kurrajong country to sandy acidic soil.

The property was originally purchased by my Grandfather in 1910 in an uncleared state.

My Father first grew lucerne as a pasture in the 1930's and it has been the major pasture rotation species ever since.

On the light sandy soil I have established very viable pastures of consul lovegrass, serradella and clover. Topdressing and weed control, are given top priority.

### **The Native Vegetation Conservation Act**

The ten year TUIC on native grassland has shortened the period I leave arable land under pasture in my overall crop-pasture rotation program, I wonder sometimes for how long can I keep this rotation going.

Lucerne in a dry land pasture situation generally thins out after about six years and the native grasses start to regenerate.

The native grasses help overall with bloat control in cattle, and provide some dry feed in drier seasons. I appreciate a mix of pasture and in some cases would like to leave these paddocks under grass for a longer period.

However this would mean I would legally lose the option of returning those paddocks back to cropping sometime in the future.

The volatility of the Australian dollar, export markets, the weather, cost of production and foreign farm subsidies all demand I maintain maximum flexibility of production. I therefore must keep my options open with my crop-pasture rotations.

I consider soil erosion and loss of soil structure etc could be along term problem if the period under pasture is not lengthened.

I can see that those producers caught with only a portion of their land left to legally farm will probably have to over farm it.

On the same subject now at age 57 I am thinking that in 10 to 15 years I may prefer to slow down do less acreage of cropping and leave paddocks out to pasture and native grass for much longer.

However this may lead to the majority of my property being covered with so called threatened species. Its future flexibility, productivity and property value under current legislation would be severely impacted upon.

I don't appreciate the thought of leaving it to my family under such restrictions. While ever my health and physical fitness remains capable of doing the job I have no intention of retiring from the property.

### **The Threatened Species Act.**

There appears to be more of our local species listed under this Act than there are that aren't!

Three that come readily to mind are Giant Red Grass and the Endangered Ecological Communities of White Box and Yellow Box.

These species grow naturally on our better red and black soil types. The implications of certain terms such as "High Conservation Value" will almost certainly lead to serious ramifications for those landowners with these species growing on their properties.

The ridiculous outcome of these two Acts so far discussed is that the legislation creates a situation where landowners must question the viability of allowing such species to continue to grow on their land.

The legislation is crying out to be amended so that it is financially and environmentally attractive to enhance the growth of such species.

### **The RACAC Process**

This is a process which I believe was supposed to deliver a balance between conservation, production and enhancement in the long term sustainable use of our natural resources.

Instead it is quickly destroying our timber industry. It is endangering a significant proportion of our grazing enterprises by deleting grazing in former forest areas now rebadged as National Park. It is promoting the destructive spread of wild dogs which destroy both native and domestic animal species.

The RACAC process has no doubt contributed to the increase in wildfire in recent years.

The huge increase in National Park area at the expense of forest land has led to a massive build up in fuel load on public land.

This factor coupled with the “lockup” management of NPWS has led to massive damage to our biodiversity and unforgivable damage to infrastructure on private property.

### **The Wilderness Act**

This is a devious piece of legislation that when applied to private freehold land savagely affects land values management and the viability of innocent farming families.

It is wrong that any third party can nominate any ones home and business and the land owner has no rights to say no until the end of the process. This is a waste of tax payers money.

The third party who often uses these Acts as a weapon or pay back can put in a complaint or nomination against a land owner has no financial out lay. The landowner is the one who has the stress and financial burden to defend him or her selves against these complaints or nomination while the third party gets away with it.

When applied to public land such as a National Park it retards access to a privileged few who have the time and the physical fitness to enter on foot such areas.

The culmination of these four legislative disincentives have had huge detrimental effects on rural, communities and individual families. It is currently contributing to long term damage to our environment and economic and social damage to our rural communities.

I have lived and worked on the farm all my life and therefore am well aware of the history of previous rural problems such as soil erosion, soil acidity, rabbit plagues etc, and the research and experimentation that was devoted to these issues before they were largely overcome.

It is obvious that the salinity issue has been politicised out of all proportions and I consider research needs to be funded rather than funding being spent trying to lay the blame on rural communities for over clearing etc.

There is no doubt in my mind that saline tolerant pasture species and crops will eventually be developed that will utilise the high water tables of these affected areas. The work that GRDC and AWI are doing in this regard are a good indicator.

Deep rooted perennial pasture, besides lowering water tables are much more drought tolerant than annual species. Lucerne and consul lovegrass have provided green feed after every fall of rain on my property during the current drought. Annual species take substantial rainfall to become established, let alone before they produce much bulk of feed.

I cannot see why the same system should not continue. An increase in the Department's funding would be opportune and overdue.

The current system of "lock up" non-interventionist land management applied to our National Parks has proved to be disastrous.

It is obvious our land must be actively managed. Our forests be thinned selectively logged and grazed.

A lot of our national parkland should be strategically grazed and at times hazard reduced by cool burns.

Native animals such as the kangaroo should be selectively harvested to reduce grazing pressure on parkland and adjoining private land. This should be done by NPWS rather than expecting private landowners to bear the cost.

In the meantime private landowners have forged ahead finetuning land management skills such as reduced or minimum tillage, improved grazing systems, better pastures and more efficient use of them.

In summary the ramifications of current environmental legislation on rural communities is virtually being ignored by Government.

Community consultation via RACAC process has proved to be a farce. It is obvious bureaucracy is playing a major role in covering up community input and concerns.

It is only by substantial personal political lobbying that rural communities are attempting to have their voices heard.

We must have flexibility to manage our land. If we are to help drought proof our properties we must be able to put in dams where appropriate. Be able to go back into cropping old grass paddocks when the drought breaks to create a cash flow without having to go through all the red tape if the paddock has not been cropped for over ten years.

Yours sincerely

Rod Young  
NSW