

**SUBMISSION IN RESPONSE TO:**

*Productivity Commission's Draft Report on the Impacts of Vegetation and Biodiversity Regulations*

From Bruce Page, 14/02/04

Further to my original submission, I would like to pursue two main points, and make an observation.

My observation is that some Land Care groups refuted in the draft report my claim that vegetation regulations are impacting adversely on the productivity of the farming community. Land Care groups in this region (Sunshine Coast hinterland) are not in the main representative of the main stream farming community. Their main focus seems to be on finding a problem and seeking Government funding to solve it. Many of the groups have developed from other Green groups as more money is available to Land Care groups.

The points I wish to further pursue are:

**1. Impact of legislation on productivity of rural communities.**

The report does not appear to focus closely enough on the impact that local government laws and by-laws are having, and will have into the future, on the productivity of rural communities. Many land-holders in South East Queensland are unaware of the impact which the new town plans will have on their land and farming practices. The State Government has set milestones that each local authority must meet in regard to their land usage and environmental issues. I will enclose a copy of some of the Rural Usage Codes for Caloundra City, to give you an idea of how intrusive they can be [Attachment 1].

The situation at the moment is that we have regulations coming from a variety of sources. Quoted in your report are the current Vegetation Management Laws for Queensland. There is also a report sitting on the desk of the Queensland Minister for the Environment proposing to upgrade the State Government environmental laws. There is the Council's local vegetation law (information included in my original submission). There are further environmental measures included in the City Plan, and a Regional Water Catchment Committee is currently investigating the need for environmental protection in catchment areas. I will enclose part of the Discussion Paper from the SEQ Western Catchment Group [Attachment 2] to demonstrate how wide ranging this discussion paper is, and it has made no reference at all to protective measures that are already in place. With the Council elections coming up, I suppose one can expect Councillors to promise more environmental legislation in an endeavour to secure the Green vote.

As I said previously, unfortunately Queensland's environmental legislation is more about securing Green votes than proper management of our environment. To further demonstrate this point I will include a brochure circulated by the Beattie Labor Government prior to the recent Queensland State elections [Attachment 3]. I will also include an editorial from the *Courier Mail* [Attachment 4] and an editorial from the *Queensland Country Life* [Attachment 5] demonstrating the great difference

between those people who are directly affected by legislation and those who live in the concrete jungles of the city.

I would like to use a couple of specific cases to demonstrate how seriously vegetation laws can impact on the asset of an individual. In my particular area a farmer cannot sub-divide into rural residential blocks - it is only possible to cut off a rural block, minimum size 40 hectares. A neighbour of mine who through financial necessity sought to cut a 60 hectare block from his property was told by Council that he would have to put in a development application, and they would take 30 metres along the water course and this would be gazetted Road Reserve for public access. This would leave the paddock without access to permanent water, thereby rendering it virtually valueless for grazing cattle. Another example is a small crop farmer who has an area of white gum timber on his property. He made application to clear this area. The Department of Natural Resources rejected his application saying that they wished to protect stands of white gum. They will not purchase the land from him; he is paying rates on it- and the whole area is within 15 km of Bribie Island National Park where there are some thousands of acres of white gum. Both these examples raise the point - is it necessary to preserve every tree and every strip of land adjoining a water course? If it is decided that this is necessary, then surely an individual land-holder should not have to carry the cost. If it is too expensive for the community to bear the financial burden, then it is definitely too expensive for an individual. **I believe it is important that the Federal Government set up a committee to draw up a code of conduct under which government authorities operate when dealing with land-holders on environmental matters.**

## 2. Timber industry

I would like to see your report look more closely at the impact that vegetation laws are having on the timber industry. This is a very important industry as it pays a major part in the development of our society. The recent building boom has highlighted the importance of this industry. I note in the Beattie election brochure [Attachment 31 that he promises to phase out all logging in native forests, and says that Labor will give the hardwood timber industry a viable future in plantation timber. In south east Queensland I predict that within five years there will be an acute shortage of hardwood timber. We are already seeing a shortage of timber for specific uses such as bridge girders and electricity poles. The pole industry is now accepting timber of lower quality to acquire sufficient timber for their needs. The sawmilling industry in this area is now carting log timber up to 400km to source millable logs for their operations. The plantation timber that Mr Beattie refers to is

- a. insufficient in quantity to fill the needs of our society, and
- b. it is at least 25 years off being ready to harvest for the sawmilling industry.

As you can see, the industry is going to face a crisis in the very near future. **I suggest that the Federal Government should draw up a blue print of how our forests should be managed in the best interests of the nation.** Timber is a very valuable resource, and should be managed by experts in the national interest - not allowed to become a sacrificial political pawn. There are plenty of people from the forestry industry who have spent a lifetime in the timber business and would be able to provide valuable information to government on how this industry should be managed. The Queensland Government department formerly known as the Forestry

Department compiled data over a long period on the production of timber and the management of forests, and this department managed our forests exceptionally well. At present there seems to be no vision in this state of how we are going to service constantly increasing demand in the future. It is my view that the plantations of hardwood in Queensland are only sufficient to complement our existing resources, not replace them.

**I recommend that representatives from the Productivity Commission committee dealing with this enquiry visit the Sunshine Coast hinterland in Queensland, so they can see for themselves the impact that vegetation regulations are already having on the timber industry.** Should such a visit be possible, I would be happy to arrange for your representatives to meet people involved in the timber industry so they may form their own opinion about the seriousness of the situation.

#### **CONTACT DETAILS**

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