

SUBMISSION TO THE PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION HEARING ON THE IMPACT OF REGULATION ON AGRICULTURE.

I am a beef cattle grazier from Central Queensland. I am 65 years old and have had my own property and cattle business for 45 years. My wife and I raised a family in a remote part of this area with no telephone or mail service for many years. I spent 15 years leading the Queensland Grazing and Grain-growing agri-political organisation, as well as running our 3000 head commercial cattle operation. About 8 years ago, we moved closer to Rockhampton, and now run an almost totally registered stud herd of 150 cows, and sell registered bulls at the National Sale.

My opening comment is to emphasize the principle that "No single solution fits all situations". I cannot stress this enough.

I will focus on four main topics.

(1) WORK PLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY.

Unfortunately, the good intentions that initiated this move have got out of control and the whole system has developed into a growth industry, providing unproductive employment for many, and enormous impact in the work place, and the community generally.

About 12 to 14 years ago I was a member of the Queensland Workplace Health and Safety Board, representing all of rural industry. The board was heavily weighted towards employee and Government members, with the result that practical solutions to issues were very rare, and regulation and bureaucracy exploded.

From practical experience recently, I have two examples:

- (a) I went to a business in Rockhampton to load some steel on our truck. I was told to stand well back and was unable to supervise the positioning of the load, with the result that had I been inspected by the Transport officers, my loading would have been illegal. I was then told not to get on the truck to facilitate tying down the load in the business yard, but was told to move out onto the street to do so.
- (b) At a recent local rural fire brigade meeting, we were advised that Regional Fire Com would be running chain saw courses for members to upgrade their skills. Most members have been using these machines for 40 years. When asked, the representatives from Fire Com office told us that the course would be 20 hours of duration over two days. Nobody went.

We recognise that Agriculture is a dangerous Industry to work in, and reasonable precautions need to be taken. Family members and employees are a critical element of a successful farming or grazing business. Skilled employees are often almost irreplaceable. The business will have a Workers Compensation Policy and carry Public Liability Insurance, and at the same time hope to never need to activate either.

(2) ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION.

My concern here extends from the largely disproportional influence by minority green groups in the community. These groups have no commitment whatsoever to business and the economy. They do not invest in industry, and they care little for employment and prosperity.

Their public comments often have no basis in fact, and indeed are sometimes totally untrue. Their research and scientific facts are mostly questionable, and they tend to use the precautionary principle to pressure Governments to regulate on matters that are entirely anti-business.

My experience as a landowner for 45 years in my own right, is that lack of understanding by Governments, and pressure from minority green activists has brought about impractical regulation on land and timber management in rural industry that is stifling production and in many cases now, is actually dramatically reducing production.

Timber thickening and encroachment are naturally occurring processes that will decrease production and at the same time impact significantly on environmental diversity, when regulation disallows sensible control. Those severe regulatory impacts are in place in Queensland.

I can give two examples of conflicting current policy and enforcement here in our local community:

- (a) Over more than 40 years, it has been policy to allow small neighbouring landowners to lease parts of State Forestry land, and in some cases, National Park land. The landowners have to control weeds and wild animals (dingoes and wild pigs particularly) as part of that arrangement. The current Queensland Government have just given notice to some of these people to vacate that leased land.
- (b) Next to our place on the Fitzroy River is a Camping and Water Reserve area of Crown Land. Neither the Local Council or the State Government have made any attempt to control the weed infestation on that Crown Land, but they have tried to force us to allow them to inspect our land for similar pests. Nor do they attempt to control campers who bring trail bikes and guns to the area and then enter private land such as ours.

At the same time, there is a proposal to build a weir on the river close by and the local green activists are again holding the project to ransom using Government introduced red-tape and regulation.

(3) LAND TENURE.

During my time owning land, I have had a range of tenures, transitioning from a Pastoral Lease to Free-holding Lease, and then to Free-hold.

Early in that period, we were required to develop the land and were regularly checked to ensure that we did meet those requirements. They included, timber clearing and regrowth control, fencing, water storage, and residential stipulations.

Nowadays, regulations restrict what can be done, and we are penalised if we attempt to maintain some of those improvements.

The development improved productivity and created employment. It increased land values and encouraged expansion and more development, which in turn helped communities to grow and prosper.

Nowadays, land has devalued and communities are dying in some areas. The fall in land values has meant that some rural operations are failing to meet banks viability conditions.

My experience is reflected in those changes. When I owned a Pastoral Lease around 45 years ago, banks treated that land almost the same as Free-hold, because they were generally extended at the end of their term, and similar development was allowed except with more supervision. That is definitely not the case today.

(4) TECHNOLOGY.

(a) Power:

The cost of power has risen dramatically in the last decade, but the service is poor. There are regular outages, and quite often long delays in restoration of service. Our experience is they can range from 12 hours to three weeks.

We pay a service fee and line maintenance fee, but there is almost no pole or general line maintenance in our area.

We also pay a meter reading fee, but may get one reading done by the corporation employees in a 12 month period. We are sent a form by email, and my wife is required to read the meter and respond on the same day.

As discussed I am providing a summary of the increase in power charges for our business.

2008:	Tariff	.98 cents per kWh
	Service Fee	18 cents a day
2009:	Tariff	2.55 cents per kWh
	Service Fee	18 cents a day

2010:	Tariff	3.25 cents per kWh
	Service Fee	21 cents a day
2011:	Tariff	Unable to find
2012:	Tariff	20.69 cents per kWh
	Service Fee	26.17 cents a day
2013:	Tariff	23.07 cents per kWh
	Service Fee	26.17 cents a day
2014:	Tariff	26.73 cents per kWh
	Service Fee	50.22 cents a day
2015:	Tariff	25.37 cents per kWh
	Service Fee	83.42 cents a day

Dec 2015: Service Fee \$1.06 per day plus
Meter Reading fee of \$6.16 for 92 days even though we have to
read the meter.

2015: Decrease in Tariff due to removal of carbon tax.

If I am correct that means in 7 years we have seen:-

Tariff Increase by 2588%
Service Fee increase by 588%

(b) Phone:

Again, the service 40 years ago was better than currently. There are long delays in repairing faults, and technicians tell us there is a major problem with parts of our cable, which they have reported, but nothing is done.

When we report a fault with the assistance of neighbours, the operator suggests diverting the phone to our mobile until repairs are done. There is almost no mobile service in our area.

(c) Mobile phone:

As I have just noted, mobile service is a problem in our area. There is only one way we can get any response around the house, and that is to connect the phone to a long aerial on the roof of the house. That sort of negates the use of the phone in a mobile mode.

This means that the adoption of new technology is not a viable option for us. Also it means that our internet access for the computer, which is wireless, has to have a long aerial on the roof.

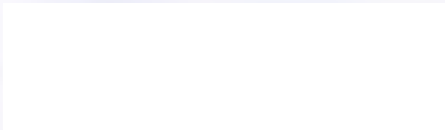
Some possible options to consider:

- (1) There needs to be a comprehensive review of Workplace Health and Safety, with a determined effort to reduce the senseless regulation and bureaucracy that impedes practical business growth. This should include the Management Boards in each State.
- (2) To get some balance back into Environmental Policy and policy delivery, there must be a compulsory requirement to place more emphasis on social and economic issues and less on the demands of minority green activists. In other words, a true consideration of the triple bottom line principle.
- (3) Include some remote and regional business people in an open and frank review of the management and delivery of power and telephony to regional Australia.
- (4) Education is a major issue and cost for rural families, including children of employees, local businesses, and service industries. This cost is an after tax item and should be made tax deductible for those who have no other option, than to send children to Boarding School.
- (5) There are a number of possible new water storage projects that have been identified throughout the country. Close to our area are two potential weirs on the Fitzroy River. They and other construction projects should be fast tracked, as water storage facilities bring employment, and growth for the economy. There is a significant multiplier effect that results.
- (6) Rockhampton has two large meatworks that kill many thousands of cattle per month. There is only one unsuitable access across the river to the facilities, so all large consignments that come in from the west by road have to park about ten kilometres out of town near the Gracemere Saleyards. The drivers have to de-couple any additional trailers other than B-Doubles, leave those cattle standing in the trailers, and take the others across. This creates an animal welfare issue for the animals, a meat quality issue for the grazier and the processor and their customers, and a safety issue for the driver, who has to transfer cattle from one trailer to another to get the rest across. There is a solution. A new route with a new bridge over the river would address that issue, and get the large cattle trucks out of the main part of the city, and that has been identified. It needs approval and funding.

In summary, I want to thank the Commissioners for their time on Friday, 29th January.

I believe that Agriculture and the families that are involved, along with the businesses that service them need to be shown some trust and support so that the wonderful opportunities available can be realised.

My overwhelming advice is that "NO ONE SINGLE SOLUTION SUITS ALL SITUATIONS".



Larry Acton

Submitted by Larry Acton, " Riverton ", Gogango. QLD. 4702.

