

TIMBER COMMUNITIES

OF

AUSTRALIA

GRAFTON BRANCH

SUBMISSION

TO

PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION

ENQUIRY ON

IMPACT OF NATIVE VEGETATION

REGULATION

1.

2.1 Impacts on landholders and regional communities:

Here on the Clarence the current Native Vegetation Legislation, Threatened Species etc Legislation has the potential to impact on all the landholders that traditionally sell timber from their properties. The Clarence Regional Vegetation Committee sat for three years making regulations to impact on the landholders in our area with out their common knowledge. They used CRAFTI Mapping with out ground truthing and operated in isolation. Consequently, when they finally went public the mapping was shown as completely flawed and inaccurate and the conditions under which the property was supposed to work actually threatened the physical wellbeing of Fire Fighters especially.

Positive Impacts

It has been hard to find positive impacts of the legislation in its current form.

Impact on Property Values:

The impact is largely word of mouth now. A logging contractor came to last months meeting and stated he was going to buy a property with an estimate of \$100,000.00 in harvestable timber under the old 50 -50 provisions they operated. He asked his son who operates the mill to walk through the property with the inspector from the old DLWC to confirm what was harvestable from the block. His son told him that they would be lucky to get \$30,000-00 out of the block. I am still waiting to get written proof of this estimate from the Department or the men. If this is indeed true then the block has lost value for the landholder and the Private Property Logging Industry.

A landholder behind Lawrence bought his block planning to develop it after seeking from the relevant departments whether he would be allowed to do this. On getting positive replies, he bought it in 1996. All the subsequent decisions have now left him with a property he cannot develop and the only market is NPWS. The last I heard from this man he still awaited their reply. His property is now designated High Conservation Value forest. He is prohibited from clearing this property or logging.

Administrative Cost for Landholders

If Property Plans are required from all land holders they will in some cases have to pay to have the plan compiled. A further worry is way the situation for a landholder may necessitate a change of management process eg, 100-year flood to 100-year drought with black frosts. It is doubtful a government dept can make the changes fast enough for the landholders. In addition, a landholder could find himself in breach of the Plan in a very short time leading to legal complications.

2.

The mismatch of Legislation and Regulation makes it impossible for landholders to operate with any certainty on their properties. In fact, one landholder asked who was going to pay the Secretary. The burden on compliance is being borne by the landholder with very little support from the Government.

Government measures to mitigate negative impacts

The various legislations and regulations need to be simplified and translated in plain English. Where the burden of compliance is being borne by section of the community there will need to be full and adequate compensation. It is a denial of natural justice to demand that landholder give up their rights to their property and enjoyment of the amenities of the property for the common good with absolutely no compensation.

Impacts on non-land-holders and regional communities

In the year, 2000 NSW Government and Federal Government signed the Upper North East Forestry Agreement. This cost in the neighbourhood of 800 jobs in Grafton itself. Prior to the State Elections 2003, the State Government added to the reserve system regrowth forests and plantations. The effect of this measure is that Crown Mills are now actively competing with Private Property Millers for the rights to timber from the Landholder. The supply of saw logs has now diminished the price of the available logs as risen substantially. Some of the smaller Private Property Millers are talking of closing down and there is concern the resource will be further reduced by the Clarence Vegetation Plan

The Scio Economic Study completed for the RFA Upper North East identified Grafton as bearing the full impact of any reduction in the viability of the Timber Industry. The Scio Economic Study completed for the Clarence Regional Vegetation Committee on their plan in 2001 also identified that Grafton would bear the full impact of the reduction in Private Property Logging. It also indicated the current provisions would adversely affect the Private Property Timber Industry in the plan.

Efficiency and effectiveness of environmental regimes

The approach taken by the State Government of over regulation and the threat of prosecution has led to land holders who were amenable to some sort environmental work taking place on their properties now refusing to come to the party. We have some 3000 signature on a petition requesting the State Government agree that all conservation on Private Property must be voluntary.

In this climate, it is hard to see how any good can possible come from the many regimes in place.

Perverse environmental outcomes?

When the plan was released for submissions and landholders and industry saw what was in store for them the timber mills received a deluge of calls to take logs while they could. Landholders who were not interested in short term logging felt that they would not be able to log in the long term.

3.

Adequacy of assessments of economic and social impacts

The consulting firm of EPM Consulting stated repeatedly they did not have the time or the information to do a full and comprehensive study into the impacts of the Clarence Regional Vegetation Plan. They were given eight weeks and a list of names to talk too. They had to use the Pre RFA Scio Economic Data as their source material.

Transparency and community consultation

The Community was consulted late in the committee's life and prior to rally organised at the Grafton Show Ground Landholders had no idea what was being decided without their input. When the plan came out corridors were added to the plan maps without the committee ever discussing them in relation to the plan.

CRAFTI Mapping

This was used as the basis for all the mapping in the Clarence Regional Vegetation Plan. At the first community consultation in a hall up at Hernani, two wetlands were identified. One is a cornfield and the other is a dam surrounded by pasture. This continued at every hall up and down the Valley. On our own property, the highest point on places has been mapped as wetland. Photographs are included.

1. Upper North East Forestry Agreement
2. Scio Economic Report UNERFA
3. Scio Economic Report CRVMP
4. TCA Grafton Submission to CRVMP
5. Photographs.