



**To the Productivity Commission  
Submission:  
Inquiry into the Impacts of Native Vegetation & Biodiversity Regulations**

As the West Wimmera Shire is largely a farming community with cropping the major income supplier, there are some effects on individuals with native vegetation regulations.

Approximately 35% of the shire is untouched native vegetation, mostly on crown land contained in many reserves including large parts of both the big and little deserts. Road reserves are heavily timbered, with major re-vegetation occurring.

Land uses are changing and there now is a changing emphasis on cropping in the southern part of the shire in traditional grazing areas. However, to grow crops such as canola and winter wheat, there often is a need to remove trees. In the northern part the size of machinery is increasing meaning that it is often difficult to get down roads and between some trees in certain paddocks.

The removal of trees in the irrigation area is also necessary to be able to run centre pivots. As the pivots generate considerable income and employment they can be stopped by objection to any tree removal.

In the main removal is very limited and requests are usually for small works. However, it should be noted that properties in the past that have removed most of their native vegetation have a very large economic advantage over those who have retained trees in close proximity to each other thus restricting all cropping activities.

When looking at specific cases, the shire has only limited control over its own planning scheme. Referrals over 10 hectares go to the D.S.E. and any decisions made by them are mandatory. This means all such applications are at the call of the officer on the day. One recent case of a block that had been cleared many times but had allowed regrowth to exceed 10 years now cannot be touched, and there is no compensation for it.

Exemptions are given for fence lines with it stated as fair and reasonable usually interpreted as 1 metre each side of the fence. This shire has no problem with that. However, it should be noted that recently press reports indicate problems in other parts of Victoria.

There is a 10 hectare exemption for vermin control. This is often opposed by the D.S.E. officers resulting in one publicised court case lost by a Victorian council at the cost of \$60,000.

There are other exemptions for farm buildings and town blocks. However, all these exemptions need to be spelt out more clearly as the D.S.E. often try and interpret what they mean, and try to put their own slant on it. Replacement numbers for removal also need to be better spelt out as there is a continual upward movement. Replacing 1 tree with 30 others makes the operation unviable, with no consideration given to other remnant and existing vegetation on private and public land. Replacement numbers are not spelt out in the Act but are the policy of the individual D.S.E branches, leading to much confusion.

In the main the native vegetation laws are accepted. However, there is a need to clarify the exemptions, and for the wider community and government officers to realise that the decisions they make can economically affect many farming operations, and, at times, farmer viability.

**Councillor Bruce Meyer**  
**Mayor**  
**West Wimmera Shire Council**