

**Native Vegetation Enquiry
Productivity Commission
LB2 Collins Street East
Melbourne Vic 8003**

Submission by

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The opportunity to express our concerns regarding the protection of bio-diversity and native vegetation on the every day operation of our farms is appreciated.

Whilst we understand the need to protect the biodiversity of this country, we seem to have lost the ability to use common sense in our decision making re. this problem. Farmers are portrayed as the rapers and pillagers of this wonderful country and nothing could be further from the truth.

As the teaching of Australian history is a long forgotten subject in our schools, we have now at least two generations of people who know very little about our origins. They do not realise, **it was on the directions of the “Government of the day” and to a precise recipe**, that this country was developed by farmers, for the production of wool, meat, grain etc etc. It was through the exports of these products to first Britain then to the rest of the world, that we were able to purchase goods that this country was unable to provide for itself.

1. It was through the saw millers that we built shelter for our settlers, built boats, towns and cities. Every six months the selector had to report to the Govt. of the day on the progress he was making on his selection. What he had cleared of timber, what he had fenced, what he had built, what crops he had sown, what animals he had reared etc. etc. **And it was on this progress that a decision was made as to whether he was considered a worthy selector.**

2. He built his home and outbuildings near creeks and rivers so there was ready access to a good water supply, for both himself and his animals.
These days he is criticised for doing both of these things.

In the 60's and 70's the farming community joined the surge to rectify the problems that over clearing had caused by joining Landcare.

In Victoria, the then Premier, Joan Kirner and the then President of the Victorian Farmers Federation, Heather Mitchell together brought the message of Landcare to the farming and to the wider community.

Local people working on local problems with the help of the government.

The success enjoyed in the early days of Landcare was phenomenal.

These days that has all been turned upside down. It is Government bureaucrats who are running the show, making all the decisions, bringing in all the experts so that the farmer has been made to feel redundant. How can he compete with the biologists,

CMA's, field naturalists, Flora and fauna experts, Local Govt., Parks, NRE ,
Aboriginal Communities.

And then we have the people who have retired to the country. They have made their money in the city businesses, and have come to live in a rural setting because they love the view, love the peace and tranquillity. But then in no time, they want to change things.

So they join the Landcare groups for something to do. And in no time at all, they are the majority attending the meeting, as the farmer is limited in the time that he can give due to work commitments. Don't think we mind this one little bit. But when those members start criticising the farmers for being too lousy to give up a bit of ground to the cause, we see red. This has happened numerous times at meetings that I have attended. Also the administration of the funding for Landcare is overwhelming. It's no wonder the support for Landcare is falling.

Below will be found examples of the everyday problems that the farming community faces when just trying to go about the business of running the farm. These examples are just in the local area.

Examples of just a few monumental stuff ups by public servants because they either failed to consult with the locals, or just plain ignored the advice given.

1. The flooding of a wetland near Sale by Parks Victoria, with seawater. Killed everything in that wetland.

Consultation with the adjoining landholders and respect for their local knowledge would have avoided the catastrophe.

2. The draining of Moodies Swamp near St James, and Dowdles Swamp near Yarrawonga, has seen the loss of the prolific bird life from these areas, especially the brolga on Moodies Swamp.

The brolga seeks protection for her eggs and young by having a barrier of water to protect them from the fox.

3. East Gippsland farmer purchases 64ha bush property, can get a permit to clear 20ha provided he enters into a covenant agreement on balance of bush area.

It should have been stated at the point of sale that these restrictions applied.

4. That the application for the supply of Fox Baits is prohibitive. Red tape and bureaucratic bungling is causing frustration among farmers wishing to control foxes either on or near their properties.

Not only do the farmers have to have a Chemical Users Certificate, it appears that they are now required to have an Animal Chemical Users Certificate. Meanwhile out in the paddocks and along creeks the foxes are breeding up, killing lambs and small fauna.

5. NSW has a simpler method of distribution and therefore is having a higher success rate controlling foxes.

All control methods of feral animals of any type should be controlled on a national basis, as they have no borders.

6. Farmer at Wedderburn grew some trees in a fenced off area, on his property. Over time the limbs on the outside rows fell over the fence. Wanting to clear the limbs in order to repair the fence, farmer is ordered to plant an excessive number of trees to compensate for a few limbs.

Well he is lost to tree planting now. Why would he grow any more when he's only creating a bureaucratic nightmare for himself? He owns the land, owns the fence, and probably paid for the trees, but still he has no control.

7. The Box Ironbark and woodlands debacle. It was a monumental cover-up of mismanagement of public money. The lack of promised consultation, the non-factual reports, the lack of honest debate etc. etc. The bullying by the bureaucrats and the ludicrous antics to get the parks through by the 2002 election would have been funny if it was not that it was going to have, far reaching affects on the neighbours to the park.

We can put names to the bullies if that time comes.

There is an inherent lack of trust in officialdom as a result of that exercise.

8. As a result of the above, people won't grow trees because there is a lack of confidence in the ownership of those trees. They believe they will be confiscated. This trend must be stopped, because we are depending on the farming and rural communities to carry on this important work.

The rules and regulations re bio-diversity and native vegetation need to be more clearly defined and give ownership back to the landowner.

9. Support for Landcare has all but evaporated in NSW and is going down the same track in Victoria. Yes, there are other organizations that do similar work but the name Landcare is synonymous with success in conservation. It is an organization that has been in partnership with farmers all over the country. **Community driven, community solutions, and with community ownership of outcomes.**

We now have city based college graduates ignoring the vast knowledge that has been gleaned over many years of living in the bush, and substituting it with ideological Fantasies. The farmers throw up their arms in frustration and walk away from the process, and then watch as years of work is undone while the weeds, ferals etc etc move in.

10. The recent fires are an example of the direction that bio-diversity in the wrong hands is going. There were lots of mistakes made in the shutting up of the national parks and expecting them to look after themselves. It doesn't work. We should have learnt, but DSE are so busy denying fault of any kind that the community has had a gut full. If they took responsibility and got on with the job of making sure it won't happen again, then they would earn the respect of the people.

The last point we would like to make is that this country depends on vibrant, productive businesses. The way to encourage those businesses to do the right

thing, is to make sure, that they have confidence that the regulations support their sacrifices to protect the environment for all.