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29/01/04

The Productivity Commission
Native Vegetation Enquiry.
LB2 Collins St East.
Melbourne . VIC.8003

Dear Sir/ Madam,

Re Impacts of Native Vegetation and Biodiversity Regulations

Firstly, we would like to thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft report.

We feel that the focus of the report is too narrow with all the emphasis being placed on farmers. It does not discuss land clearing in urban areas and urban development particularly along the Eastern and Southern Seaboard of Australia. This is having a huge impact on biodiversity due to the loss of large tracts of native vegetation. Crown land also needs to be included in the overall focus.

Further information and research is required into outcomes of legislation already in place. It is clear that in the area of the Sunshine Coast in Queensland that both preemptive clearing and illegal clearing has taken place prior to the stopping of broad scale clearing so that future urban development can occur on both rural and non-rural land.

Monitoring and evaluation of policies is essential to ensure the best outcomes for both the environment and the landholder. Accurate vegetation mapping is also essential prior to clearing, on both private and Crown land. The cost of losing biodiversity is immeasurable.

The simplification of legislation and unification of policies and regulation between Local, States and Territories and Federal agencies would be of major benefit and would reduce complexity permit applications and the financial burden of appeals in the courts.

We agree that the responsibility of environmental problems should be shared and is best done so in a partnership between Community, Landholders and all levels of Government. While it is ideal that regional government is best to deal with such problems, far greater support from other Government body's, resources and expertise would be required. It could fail if not correctly supported.

We often see first hand, government bodies refusing to make decisions or accept responsibility for local issues by saying it is another government agency issue. This buck-passing is obstructive and frustrating to say the least.

Government needs to accept some responsibility for environmental services. Some people both in urban and rural areas don't accept the environmental implications of their actions. Strong leadership from government is essential in showing the community at large that we are part of the problem and also the solution. There are many instances in the past where government has encouraged land clearing to promote increased productivity. The implications of these decisions are still being felt with landholder left to deal with its associated problems now. Governing bodies have a major role in promoting and facilitating best practice in conservation activities and sustainability in partnership with the entire community to maximize productivity and biodiversity.

The Draft Recommendation 7 seems a bit of a cop out. While we strongly agree that local solutions are ideal it usually requires huge commitment by volunteers and is impeded by bureaucracy. The distances in rural Australia would also make this even more difficult. Landholders already are bearing the costs of their actions and need financial incentive to initiate any actions they may take towards sustainable farming. The local community can play a huge role in this area with a lot of practical support.

Land of strong conservation value needs to be retained for that purpose and maintained. This could be done by the landholder with financial incentive to maintain it in its natural state or purchased by the Government. If Government buys this land it needs to be responsibly cared for. When is loss of biodiversity, loss of species and loss of greenhouse objectives cost effective?

Environment one way or another effects us all, we need to work together as Australians to achieve the best possible outcome for future generations.

Yours Sincerely,
Leigh Warnemunde
President of Coolum District Coast Care Group