

Submission to the Inquiry into the impacts of native vegetation and biodiversity regulations

In particular how they impact on

- *Farming practices, productivity, sustainability, property values and returns,*
- *Landholders' investment patterns and the attitude of finance providers*
- *Other economic activities such as infrastructure development and mineral exploration; and*
- *Flow on effects to regional communities*

How have these regulations affected my property management? For the best, that's how! The Threatened Species Act (TSA) has been useful for me to get funding to fence off my creek lines. These Box Gum riparian areas were in a sad state, and now after obtaining grants and revegetating the area, these areas are bio-diverse, erosion is under control, weeds are on the decline and we now have a couple of koalas! If this riparian corridor had not come under the TSA, I do not believe we could have done the remedial work necessary.

I find it amazing that those farms blessed with threatened ecosystems and animals complain! Obviously historic local practices in these areas have not adversely affected the species, otherwise they would not be there! Careful communication with local NPWS staff have enabled me to adapt my practices to the sensitive nature of these areas, and through this learning process I believe that I have become a better farmer.

To protect sensitive habitats and animals on my farm requires a number simple tasks. These range from the retention of dead hollow trees, fencing the riparian zone, and the sensible management of areas with lone trees. Add to this the revegetation and woodlot projects, and I believe that my property will become more profitable. The area involved is a small proportion of the farm, yet these key measures, I'm sure, have a far greater impact.

I hear a number of local farmers complain about the potential loss of land due to 'not working it' for more than 10 years. Recent work has shown that by direct drilling new crops into pasture, you retain both the native grasses, and gain benefits of a planted crop – either for the stock or as a crop. This 10 year law is easily got around. The simple act of spreading super is enough to reset the 10 year clock, yet the noise coming from some of my fellow farmers imply that we'll all lose the lot if we are not careful.

I find it sad that the NSW Farmers Association appears to be against all environmental regulation. This organisation lobbies both federal and state government on the behalf of big farming business – not the grass root majority of farmers in our state. If they only would embrace these legislation, and work cooperatively with government bodies, we would soon be in a country that does have a sustainable farming future.

If my farming colleagues are finding farming tough with the volatility of the Australian dollar, export markets, the weather, cost of production and foreign

farm subsidies. The best way to fix this is to make our product earn more. How can I do this? The only way to raise prices is to restrict supply – graze less animals. If all farmers did this then we would all get more for our hard work.

For example 30 years ago a steer was bringing about (in 1974 dollars) \$1.20/kg. Recently I sold a similar beast and only got \$1.40/kg. I have severely reduced the number of head that I now run, and this beast was in good shape – yet I received this pitiful price. Farmers and rural communities are suffering do to unsustainable over production not the enforcement of regulations that in the long run aim to make us farmers sustainable.

I find it hard to believe that environmental regulations are draconian enough to force farmers from the land. As I have stated earlier it is farmers over producing that forces prices down which then leads to farm closures. Any environmental regulations act as a safety net, ensuring that there will always be farms, and these farms don't adversely affect the environment that we all live in.

This loss of real estate prices has seen the dramatic decline of small rural towns. A couple of other overlooked forces that has also caused the decline of rural communities are better roads and cars. Previously people from my community rarely would have made the trip into the regional centre of Dubbo – too hard and too far. Now the trip takes less than an hour! Why should I shop in Binnaway or even Coonabarabran (40 minutes away), when I have to go to Dubbo to get things done anyway. Food is cheaper, fuel is cheaper and there is a full range of government and services available

How do we halt this? Changing environmental legislation certainly won't stop this continual decline. Raising the price of fuel, so as to make the travel to Dubbo less attractive is one possible way, another would be to place a toll on the roads between major towns, profits being returned to those small communities. Both of these suggestions will not happen, yet if they did, they would certainly halt the decline that our small towns are experiencing.

Perhaps, instead of wasting the public's money on witch-hunt inquiries, the money could be better spent recognising those land managers, who manage the land sustainably AND make money doing so – not flogging the life out of it! It is through learning new methods and ways, not the same old thinking that will solve the problems we now have.

Clearing: It is obvious that the Australian countryside is suffering from the effects of over clearing. After over 170 years of questionable farming practices we now must have enough land available for our farming enterprises.

In our area, in particular, we have a lot of 'scrub' left on the ridges. Generally those areas with 'fertile' soils have been cleared, leaving a countryside with acid soils, rising salinity and erosion problems. It is sad to see the decline of the large paddock trees, especially when there is no new tree to replace them.

Still clearing is happening, through 'exemptions' and illegal acts. Yet to my knowledge NSW DLWC have not prosecuted anyone for illegal clearing. It is obvious that what we need is strong legislation to halt **ALL** clearing and a will to enforce it. With satellite technology it is easy to monitor areas and then prosecute those responsible. Hopefully the Wentworth group will supply a suitable framework to address this problem.

I feel comfortable with the knowledge that if my neighbours decide to embark on a questionable development, that regulations will guide them to minimise the impact on my farm and the my local catchment. Without these regulations we would farm in a siege like environment, neighbours not trusting neighbours. Regulations ensure that we all play on a level and sustainable playing field.

I hope the inquiry finds the right answer to all our problems, but to blame the environment for symptoms of a stressed environment is folly.

Perhaps the question should be "**What would be the impacts if the environmental legislation did not exist**". This would be an indicator of how good a job the current legislation is doing, and highlight those areas of concern for all of us!

All the best,

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