

Submission – Carbon Farming Initiative Bill

13th April, 2011

My name is Mike Parish, I managed properties holistically for 13 years and in that time I was able to produce significant ecological changes and at the same time what I was doing was becoming more profitable each year, the input cost were reducing and the output was increasing.

I have had experienced running a large organic beef operation and in that time seen a big increase in biodiversity and ecological health. There is a snow balling effect, as soil health improves so does the numbers of microbes in the soil increase, so there is more for larger animals and birds to eat and so on to the top of the food chain, our raptors and predators.

While managing this organic beef operation on a property, "Old Turee" Coolah NSW I ran a trial from 1995-2000 on 6 soil testing sites across the property, at the start of the trial the average organic matter of the soil test sites was <2% and after 5 years of time control or planned grazing, the average had moved to >5%. That is an increase in soil carbon of 2% in that time frame, so I am firmly convince farmers will play a major role in reducing the effects of climate change as well as reversing the degradation that has happened to our landscape over the last 100 or so years.

I now am now a Senior Teacher and advisor with Resource Consulting Services on a contractual basis; this is the company that originally trained me in 1993. I have also completed Holistic Management training in 1995.

I have been doing face to face training and facilitating for over 5 years now and what really frustrates me is how long it takes for change to happen.

I am also involved with Healthy Soils Australia (HSA), as a director and Treasurer; this is on a pro bono basis. HSA is a group of likeminded individuals who want to create a network and to provide a platform to reconnect the vital role of soil health with food integrity and human health.

Additionality- This definition needs to encourage the uptake of regenerative agricultural practices so as to have a rapid transition of a significant number of farmers. If there are any impediments or vague guide lines, I feel there will be resistance to change. People are scared of change and doing something that is different than their peers. I know from firsthand experience the pressure that comes from your peers in agriculture and other farmers. It so logical the need for change but the pressure becomes too much and they slip back to the old method.

Take time control grazing or planned grazing for example, it was first introduced to Australian graziers over 20 years ago by Resource Consulting Services, and I first became aware of this method 19 years ago. I have already spoken about my experiences using this method earlier. What frustrate me is, that after all these years with many great examples to be seen, the percentage change would be in the low single digits.

I see a great opportunity with a price mechanism on carbon, to create an incentive for farmer to change to a more regenerative method of agriculture. By paying farmer to sequester carbon there will be a real win-win for Australia, not only will it make agriculture more profitable, by increasing carbon in the soil, it will capture and hold more water, which will generate more grass, more grass with good grazing management will pump carbon into the soil to feed the microbes and the soil food web. As the soil food web increases so will biodiversity and production, and an increase in more grass and therefore sequestering more carbon.

The farmer will be more productive and with additional income from carbon trading will inject this into their local community and that will increase the prosperity of rural communities. There is also the resilience factor, as the carbon increases, so does the resilience of the landscape, so there will be less need for Exceptional Circumstances. In the 15 years I was managing rural properties there were 2 significant droughts 1994-1995 and 2001-2009 and one minor drought 1997, in all those droughts the properties I managed didn't have to resort to drought feeding livestock and didn't claim any EC assistance. We didn't need to because we were managing for healthy pastures, so were making sure we matched the amount of livestock to the varying carrying capacity of the land. We maintained good ground cover and protecting the pastures from being eaten out and come out of the droughts in good shape.

What I have talked about can be seen in all parts of Australia where there are grasslands; there are very positive changes ecologically, socially and economically I can give real examples from many parts of Australia.

Mike Parish