

Hon Dr Bob Such MP
Member for Fisher



25 February 2010

Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary

**Native Vegetation Laws, Greenhouse Gas Abatement
And Climate Change Measures**

I respond to the invitation to provide a submission to the Inquiry and offer the following comments on several of the Committee's Terms of Reference.

1. The impact of native vegetation laws and legislated greenhouse gas abatement measures on landholders, including:

(b) compensation arrangement to landholders resulting from the imposition of such laws;

- Farmers and pastoralists should be seen as custodians of our natural heritage and, in support thereof, I recommend compensation to landholders affected by native vegetation laws and greenhouse gas abatement measures similar to that offered in South Australia.
- The South Australian Government introduced the Heritage Agreement Scheme in 1980 in response to concerns about over-clearance of bushland in agricultural regions.
- By mid 2009, 1,449 Heritage Agreement landholders had ensured long-term protection of over 620,800 ha of South Australia's original vegetation¹.
- The Heritage Agreement is a legal contract between the landholder and the government for the conservation in perpetuity of native vegetation and wildlife habitat on a specified area of land.
- The agreement is registered on the title of the land and is transferred with the ownership of the land.

¹ The Heritage Agreement Scheme, Department for Environment and Heritage:
http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/biodiversity/ecosystem-conservation/heritage_education.html

- In signing the agreement, the landowner becomes eligible for a range of incentives to provide financial assistance for the management of the land, relief from rates and taxes, and fencing assistance if required.
- During the life of the program, the South Australian Government has allocated over \$80 million from public funds in recognition that protection of the bush, conservation of biodiversity and good land management benefits the entire community.
- It is also an economical and cost-effective system since it is cheaper to retain remnant bush than to attempt to rehabilitate degraded land.
- In light of the success of this innovative and effective South Australian initiative, I would recommend it to the Inquiry.

(d) any other related matter.

- In Australia, we have an appalling record of loss of native vegetation and habitat removal as a result of land clearance, urban growth, weed infestation, feral animals, grazing, trail bike riders and environmentally damaging diseases.
- As much land was cleared in the last 50 years as in the 150 years before 1945; significant clearing is still taking place. A comparison between the estimated annual rates of clearance in 1990 indicated that the amount of native vegetation cleared in Australia was more than half that cleared in the Brazilian Amazonia².
- Destruction of native vegetation, combined with other threats, leads to land degradation, salinity and declining water quality, and is the biggest cause of biodiversity loss. Accordingly, many species are now in decline.
- Moreover, the current pattern of native vegetation clearance is linked to the release of large amounts of greenhouse gases.
- South Australian clearance rates might be cited as a microcosm of the degree of loss across Australia:
 - Less than 3 per cent of pre-European settlement vegetation of the Adelaide Plains now remains intact.
 - Grey Box Woodland (*Eucalyptus macrocarpa*) once covered vast areas of the Adelaide Plains and foothills but less than 4 per cent has been retained in a natural state.
 - Less than 10 per cent of the original native vegetation remains in most arable areas of South Australia; few arable areas of Australia have been cleared to this extent.
 - Approximately 25 per cent of all plants and animals recorded in South Australia are considered to be threatened due to historical loss of habitat. For mammals the figure is 63 per cent.
 - Indeed, Australia has the worst record of mammal extinction in the world, and the major cause of biodiversity loss is land clearing
 - Only 13 per cent of the original native vegetation remains in the Mount Lofty Ranges which have been extensively cleared for

² <http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/publications/series/paper6/bioch-summary.html>

grazing and dry land agriculture. These areas are fragmented and subject to ongoing pressures, resulting in a significant decline of native species that are dependent upon native vegetation.

- A number of species of woodland birds depend on these vestiges of native vegetation. In light of this, approximately half (ie about 50) of the species of birds inhabiting the Mount Lofty region are predicted to go regionally extinct based on the quantity of habitat that remains. Ten bird species have already become regionally extinct.
- International opposition has been mounted against deforestation in the developing countries Brazil and Indonesia, for cattle ranching and commercial plantation monoculture, but Australia's record shows that, even though a developed country, we have already cleared vast areas of our own native vegetation.
- I would also point out that while farmers may own their land, this involves responsibilities as well as entitlements. We live in a community which requires mutual obligations, ie care for the land, care for natural heritage, as part of the 'right to farm'.

(2) In conducting this inquiry, the committee must also examine the impact of the Government's proposed Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, and the range of measures related to climate change announced by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr Abbott) on 2 February 2010.

- Consideration must be given to farmers to ensure that they are treated fairly in relation to carbon sequestration so that it does not become a one-sided obligation, eg cows produce methane but grasslands and vegetation sequester carbon.
- Under any CPRS/trading scheme/tax, we must take into account both the positives and negatives of farming.

I welcome this Inquiry and look forward to the report.

Yours sincerely

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