

Submission in Relation to the Senate Committee Inquiry into 'Native Vegetation Laws, Greenhouse Gas Abatement and Climate Change measures'.

1. General description of our situation

We have a property in the Southern Highlands situated on the Wombeyan Caves Road, about 30km west of Mittagong. It has an area of 968 hectares and falls within the Hawkesbury-Nepean Water Catchment zone. When the family purchased the property in 1956 it was virtually all used for sheep grazing. When we took it over in 1977 we continued grazing sheep, but for financial reasons also had to continue with our off-farm occupations. We found that most of our time on the farm had to be spent trying to control serrated tussock, which had become particularly invasive during the 60's and 70's. We concentrated on our better and more accessible paddocks, with the result that other areas gradually reverted to native bush.

We always intended to change this situation and increase the carrying capacity once we were able to get on to the farm full-time. However, when at last the time came for us to do this we found that our hands were tied by the provisions of the NSW Native Vegetation Act. We have four children, all in their late thirties. Two of our sons are now living on the farm with us. They earn income off-farm, but want to be able to stay here and use the property productively. We are all concerned about conservation and about the issues of global warming. However, we have a property that could be developed sensitively to the point where it could produce an income, were it not for the strictures of government.

2. Diminution of land asset value and productivity as a result of Native Vegetation, Greenhouse Gas Abatement and Climate Change Laws/Measures

- a) These laws have virtually made it impossible for us to run our farm as an income-producing grazing property.
- b) The land asset value has also been greatly reduced from a sub-divisional/real estate point of view. People purchasing land (in our area a minimum of 40 hectares) want to be able to clear it for building, for bushfire protection, for views and for hobby farming.

3. Compensation

- a) The NSW Government, through its Native Vegetation Act, has deprived us of our capacity to earn an income through grazing. We have a significant area of freehold land, much of which could be used for grazing if we were free to develop it as we see fit. What does freehold mean these days? Although we are sensitive to the environmental concerns expressed in the Act, we feel strongly that compensation at least for the lack of potential income is warranted, let alone for the psychological angst and uncertainty we have suffered worrying about the future of our property. We have certainly cared for our land, but now find ourselves unable to use it for our own benefit.

- b) We have no desire to sell our land. However, should it come to the point where we, or our children, might be forced to do so, then we would argue that the NSW Government has greatly reduced its saleability through its restrictions on our ability to prepare and sell the land as we might see fit, and should thus be liable to pay due compensation.
- c) If the government insists that we conserve all of our native bush, then surely compensation is payable for the years of work we have put in to ridding it of both noxious and nuisance weeds, and for preserving our native species.
- d) When we first heard about carbon trading, we had expected that we would at least get significant carbon credits for the wealth of our vegetation, which has been off-setting greenhouse gas emissions for years. Instead, following the Peter Spencer protest, we found that the Commonwealth Government was claiming all carbon credits over private land for its own benefit. **This is not fair.**
- e) Furthermore, it appears that farmers who plant trees on cleared land will be able to claim carbon credits, whereas people like ourselves who have preserved their trees will miss out. **This also is not fair.**

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