

Senate Standing Committee on Finance & Public Administration
RE: Native Vegetation Legislation Enquiry

Dear Honorable members,

Thanks for seeking to improve the very poor management of planning of the environment, in relation to native vegetation , in particular .

As you will be aware from reading this short submission, I spent 33years giving independent risk management advice to a wide range of Local, State government and industry innovators , often on the ground, where it mattered.

Coordinating statutory responses for the Victorian Department of Conservation and Environment (as it was then)was part of my work for about ten years before the specific introduction of NVR legislation (S13) . Several of us in the regional office were involved in trying to reform what we always considered its misplaced focus from its earliest days.

Our good reputation (we used advisory rather than referral status) and effectiveness in the previous decade were dependant on being able to argue issues of long term damage and economic unsustainability.

Strangely, the NVR legislation was, and remains, a focus on short term gains and unsustainable attempts to control and preserve what will probably change anyway.

Up until the mid 1990's , I coordinated full responses for the local office of Department of Natural Resources and Environment across the full range of environmental risk responses from water quality protection , fire risk, parks management , vegetation controls and ecosystem resilience. My major area of expertise has built from farm management through completion of graduate studies in agriculture science and applied geomorphology at University.

Unexpectedly , despite its short term focus, the various restructures (including the introduction of new Authorities into the work area) left the hard work of sound engagement with rural land managers to noone in many areas of Victoria .

On ground planning with respect for engagement and custodianship was replaced with often unqualified and improperly trained people reading out plant lists ; supported in theory , by absent policy documents produced by the new purchasers of services in new quangos .

Where to now ?

As an experienced planner , I am well aware of the difficulty of creating the catharsis needed to overturn a culture of wasted good intentions and duck shoving. I therefore

have suggested one main and essential change. The main suggestion's advantage is that its simple, much more cost effective, and the results are easily measured and monitored .

There are other areas of change in process worth considering, no doubt, and more thought needs to be given them than I have time now to .

Because those who now prosecute the idea of "a planning instrument" have little idea of sound environment risk management principles, and little respect for custodianship and education, I would seek to disconnect most of the drip feed systems in this area .

An alternative ? Perhaps offering the task to one local regional body responsible and accountable for planning and infield engagement .

Any effective and credible reformed regional body would have to be serious about training environmental risk management scientists ; developing competencies that go well beyond naming important plants and animals, and ensure its staff are able to make responsible decisions that they are finally accountable for themselves.

I apologise for the lack of details and examples, but not for being forthright about the seriousness of the current misplaced consensus and misplaced concreteness over planning and environment ambitions and focus.

If you would like to hear more, I can certainly bring some more details with me.

I only heard about this enquiry yesterday and would be happy to address any of your questions in a more detailed way, at a future date .

Yours truly

John L.Modra

Attached :

1. **A future fund for biodiversity** – limits of the current system
2. **What can the commonwealth do?**- facilitating improvements