

Clr Keith Dance.

Submission to Senate Inquiry into Native Vegetation laws

May I draw the Senate's attention to the following?

As a rural producer trying to earn a living from the land for the past 40 years I find that the continued threat to any profitably is the continued interference of legislation that stops me from using my land to its potential. We do not ask any industry to develop and increase productivity only to be told that when you have the technology available you must not use it and further that you are to revert your pastures to 1770 equivalents. This would equate to allowing Woolworths to build a shopping complex yet not to be able to use computerized systems and to leave 30% of the shelves bare.

Since 1999 when NSW first introduced land clearing restrictions without any consultation, rural landholders have learnt to live with the bans particularly on the coastal strip. The woody weed problem west of the divide is a huge problem. The problem is that rural land is continually being taken out of production as regrowth takes over cleared farming lands. To then to try to reclaim these lands back to food production we meet a continual refusal of many departments devising regulations on how to stop a property owner from exercising their freehold rights. We as the ones that have lived within our landscapes for generations take offence to urban based bureaucrats telling us what is best for us and our country.

The insidious cancer that is spreading beyond the Vegetation Acts is the continual growth of the Ecological Endangered Communities (EEC). These have been administered under the Threatened Species Act and the land mass that falls under the influence of this act continues to grow. Many of the so called threatened species are now native grasses that are endemic from the Victorian border to north of Nowra.

What has occurred is that interest groups continually put to the Scientific Committee flora and fauna groups to be included as threatened often without full research to validate the claims. Once declared and without affected landholder's knowledge Local government and the CMA then start the process of refusing landholders legitimate use of their land. There are no avenues of appeal and I have yet to see an EEC withdrawn even if the original process to protect has been proven incorrect.

We have many examples in the Eurobodalla Shire Council area of when a Development Application (DA) requiring a flora and fauna study may find a sample of native grasses and even though not dominant will bring the Threatened species Act into play. If it is thought that it may be possible to regenerate the potential EEC major restrictions will apply. Often this will require fencing of the land involved, restricting grazing from 1st September to 1st March as well as a program to eliminate introduced grasses as well as weeds. A recent DA asked that 75% of the property be quarantined from any form of agriculture, while another insisted that a Habitat Corridor be manufactured even though properties either side are cleared

rural properties with no apparent linkages to existing corridors. These actions pay no heed to the increased fire risk to the community when land is locked up and left to natural cycles. When staff were asked why the neighboring properties still involved in agriculture are not forced to comply with the same conditions the reply is that “when they apply for a DA we will get them.”

Once the land owners comply with these conditions the Property Vegetation Plans must then be registered with the Catchment Management Authority and attached to the property title. If one refuses to comply with these outrageous conditions then Council will refuse your DA. It is close to extortion!

To lock up private property in this fashion is criminal. As a world producer of food it is immoral to allow productive land to be removed from production of food when the world population continues to grow between five and six million people every month. The time will soon arrive when all available to land capable of producing food will be needed.

If private land is resumed for the community good then there is a system to provide “Just Term Compensation” to the landholder. The same principle must apply when the governments place productive restrictions on freehold lands, the community must be prepared to compensate the rightful owner.

Thanking you for the opportunity to place before my views on this matter.

Yours truly

Keith Dance