

Wade Bidstrup

To whom it may concern,

Thank you for allowing me to make a submission to the senate on the impact of native vegetation laws and legislated greenhouse gas abatement measures on landholders.

My name is Wade Bidstrup, and I am a farmer from _____ on the _____ in _____. Along with my wife and children, and parents, we grow amongst other things, dryland (rain grown) cotton, maize, sorghum, wheat, chickpeas, mung beans and millet. I returned to the family farm after completing a bachelor of Engineering (mech.) degree, and I also have a postgraduate certificate in rural science.

I believe the impact on landholders from the native vegetation laws is immense. While I do not particularly have a problem with protecting native vegetation (indeed we've planted over 5000 native trees on our property in the last 20 years), I do have a particular problem in that the loss of property rights that goes with these laws is unjust, unfair and takes away from our liberties as a free society. We have voluntarily left native flora to grow on our property without being coerced by governments, however I believe that as rightful owners of the land we should be able to do, within reason, what we wish to do with our land to make a fair living.

I'd like to make it clear that I am not and never have advocated a bare earth policy to land clearing, as can be witnessed by our farming practices, however I believe that if a government, acting on behalf of the greater public, dictates to me that I am to leave a portion of my land 'locked up' forever, than I believe that the government acting on behalf of the public should fairly compensate me for this. Moreover, I think it is a disgrace that as well as locking up this land and losing all productive capacity from it (as paid for when the property was purchased), the farmer should be responsible for paying the rates on the land, maintaining fences to preserve the land and controlling feral animals and weeds that profligate in these areas. Surely if this land is locked up for the public good then the government should pay the rates, maintain the fences and ensure that weeds and feral animals are controlled, not to mention compensate the landholder fairly for the loss of production attributable to that land and/or compensate the landholder to the market value of the land. If the government is not prepared to do that than it should be prepared to pay the landholder to maintain the land, given that for all intents and purposes he/she no longer owns it given that they have little say in how it is operated.

Clearly, the loss of property rights through native vegetation laws has a negative impact on the land asset value as there is no longer the same area of land that is of use to a prospective buyer, and the same can be said for the productivity for the landholder. In some cases, there would be no doubt that this imposition would be enough to render some landholders unprofitable. This is wrong, and in fact has only come about in the first place

as a result of the landholder managing their land appropriately so as to conserve native vegetation and gain some production from it in a sustainable manner. Indeed, if all the landholders affected simply cleared their land many years ago before native vegetation laws were introduced and showed no regard for the natural ecology of the land, they would have no such problems with these laws – they would have no native vegetation to protect!

The government Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, I believe, is fundamentally flawed. The only way there can be any net increase in any gases in the atmosphere, be they Carbon Dioxide, Methane or Nitrous Oxide, is by mining them (extracting the gases from a previous age) and releasing them into the atmosphere. While it is true that there are more ruminants on the Earth now than perhaps any time in the past, the fact remains that the methane they emit gets broken down in the atmosphere over a period of just 12-14 years! The elements that make up methane, Carbon and Hydrogen, then combine with Oxygen to make water and Carbon Dioxide that goes on to make plants grow for another animal to eat. This is a completely natural and contained cycle that has been happening on Earth for millions of years. Farmers should not be penalized for this, and indeed if they were to pay for the emissions from their animals they should therefore be rightly paid that money, with interest, back after 14 years when the methane from those animals no longer exists in the atmosphere.

The Nitrous Oxide debate is similar in that farmers need to have Nitrogen available to plants if they are to grow a crop (indeed humanity would suffer immensely if Nitrogen was not available to crops). This Nitrogen can come from many sources, be they fossil fuel based Nitrogenous fertilizers (Urea, Anhydrous Ammonia), or legumes. Either way, the form of Nitrogen that is overwhelmingly needed by the plant is Nitrate Nitrogen. It is also the Nitrate form of Nitrogen that is predominately responsible for Nitrous Oxide emissions through denitrification. Therefore, for a plant to grow to its maximum potential it needs to have access to the same amount of Nitrate Nitrogen no matter what the source of it is, and as such the same amount of Nitrate Nitrogen is ultimately exposed to denitrification and Nitrous Oxide emissions. In the end, legumes effectively provide slow release Nitrate so that there is not the bulge of the Nitrate available for denitrification in any waterlogging event. Good farmers understand this and that is why it is commonplace for precise amounts of Nitrogen to be applied, for split applications of N to occur and for the massive uptake of legumes in crop rotations. Perhaps the biggest driver for the decrease in Nitrous Oxide emissions is the fact that farmers pay a very large price for Nitrogen and to see it lost in Nitrous Oxide emissions is literally having your money go up in air.

I am not familiar with the scheme put forward by the coalition, although I would say that in a farming sense, the reduction of Nitrous Oxide emissions is a benefit to farmers back pockets' and the environment, so I don't believe a punitive scheme need be used. Surely an education scheme teaching the few farmers who don't already understand that the reduction in Nitrous Oxide emissions would save them a significant amount of money would be a superior way to go.

The issue of carbon sequestration is also one that has some flaws. Soils can only hold so much organic carbon until that carbon comes into balance with the natural population of soil biota that emits carbon in that soil. When this occurs the organic carbon levels in the soil effectively plateau out. This level can be reached through farming methods such as the very popular zero till and controlled traffic methods. The farmers who already do this and have the least impact on the environment would effectively be disadvantaged by a price put on organic carbon, as they would have no scope to increase their levels and profit from a rising OC%. Therefore, farmers who have always in the past emitted the most Carbon from the soil would have everything to gain from this scheme as there would be more scope to increase the organic carbon levels of their soil. Fortunately, an increase in organic carbon levels in the soil is positively correlated with an increase in productivity from that land (via improved water infiltration, soil structure etc) and as such farmers do their utmost to increase these levels without the need for a CPRS. This is another example of where a program to educate the few farmers who don't understand this, to entice them into farming methods that increase OC levels, would benefit both farmers and the environment.

I believe the idea of tree plantations on farming land is poorly thought out and lacks any semblance of logic. The need for a massive increase in food supply over the next century and beyond is indisputable, with just one fact being that the FAO predicts that the world will need to produce as much food in the next 50 years as it has since civilization began, all with the use of less water, loss of land through urbanization and the dwindling of mined nutrient supplies, particularly Phosphorus. Given this, I think it is a travesty to the 1 in 6 people in the world who currently go to bed hungry every night that we have the hubris to convert food-producing land into tree plantations. If the government were serious about establishing carbon sinks on farming land, they would purchase the grain from farmers (which is approximately 40% Carbon) and stockpile it. They would do this year after year and the farming land would remove up to 10 tonnes of Carbon from the atmosphere for every hectare in the scheme for eternity. This is unlike tree plantations that remove a significant amount of Carbon from the atmosphere while they are growing, but sequester absolutely no Carbon after they are fully grown. Tree plantations are also prone to devastation from fires in which case the majority of the Carbon sequestered by them is lost to the atmosphere. The advantage of buying grain from farmers and stockpiling it is that it could one day be used to feed hungry people if that is what the government so desired, and it wasn't concerned about the resultant carbon emissions from food consuming humans.

Having said all that, I am not against a price on Carbon emissions that are fossil fuel based for the simple reason that one day, perhaps not for 100 years, fossil fuels will not be available for exploitation as they are today. I believe it is the users of these fossil fuels (be they petrol, diesel or Urea users) that should in some way fund sustainable alternatives. Farmers should not be penalized for completely natural and sustainable processes.

Thankyou for taking the time to consider my submission.

Yours sincerely,
Wade Bidstrup