

To the Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee.  
Inquiry into Native Vegetation Laws, Greenhouse Gas Abatement and Climate Change Measures.

As a beef producer on the North Coast of NSW with a 130 breeder operation supplying yearlings to a local butcher and veal through the Casino meatworks I offer my thoughts.

The North Coast is an area where growing trees is not difficult. In fact due to poor returns from agriculture in general for years, much of the less productive country has returned to forest. I have some forest on my property which I maintain for the replacement of timber fence posts and timber in general. I have absolutely no intension of clearing it and would like to allow it to expand but the unrealistic Native Veg. definition of "Clearing" takes away my control of that regrowth country. Areas of forest are an asset to a property. Too many trees considerably reduce its productivity.

The Government and the community in general seem intent on telling me what I must do with areas of my property. They are forcing their environmental ideals on me so they don't have to do anything themselves and there is the threat of punishment if I fail to meet their expectations. If the community wants to take away my right to decide what I do with my property, a right I have been paying for for many years through my bank mortgage, then the community has to compensate me. This may not be State Government Law but it should be. If a piece of land is resumed for the community good for a new piece of road the land owner is compensated. What's the difference?

How to arrive at a compensation figure is the next question. If an owner is to be excluded completely from a piece of his land then he is entitled to full market value, including fencing. Of course this may create a situation where the remainder of the farm is no longer viable in which case there would be no alternative but for the government/ community to buy the whole farm. By the way, who is going to look after all this country? At the moment land owners look after it at no cost to the community. If a land owner loses the right to use a piece of land but is required to maintain it then compensation must be in the form of:

- 1- A calculation of its productive value based on the rest of the farm, therefore income lost, and that figure paid annually
- 2- The full cost of fencing including on going cost in the event of fire, flood or what ever.
- 3- A stewardship amount calculated on the amount of work required to maintain it including any chemical or contracting costs required, paid annually or more often if that is a large figure.
- 4- A reduction in council rates to reflect the area no longer under the land owner's control.

Announcements made by the Leader of the Opposition may work for us and also against us. Research into carbon storage in soils benefits everyone. The community gets its carbon stored and the farmers get better soil. On the other hand planting a huge number of trees means that more productive country is under threat of being locked up and unproductive for many years, not only affecting farmers but also the local community

that rely on them Eg meat works, machinery sales, grain sales etc. This is happening now on the North Coast with many productive farms bought and planted to trees.

Today's farmers are aware of their responsibility to not effect the environment in the way they go about their business and many have undertaken projects to improve damaged areas. In general we are seen as having no respect for the environment because of actions like felling a tree or burning an area but these can have long term beneficial effects.

Everyone has an opinion on the environment but very few have to deal with it on a day to day basis. Farmers are producers of food and fibre and at the moment with very poor financial return.

Unlike intangibles like stocks and shares or frivolous things like wide screen TVs and 4wd motor cars in the city, what we produce is essential to life so farmers must be appreciated and listened to.

Mike Kena