

1 March 2010

Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee

Inquiry into the impact of the Native Vegetation Laws and Legislated Greenhouse gas abatement measures on Landholders.

Let me say right from the beginning that there is not and never has been any suggestion by people in agriculture that land should be cleared of all trees.

a) The NSW Native vegetation act has had a major impact on land values.

Un-cleared land in the Gwydir valley is virtually un-saleable. Properties with substantial tree cover are either heavily discounted or simply not attractive to buyers.

Those that have not cleared land because of financial constraints or a grazing regime now find they have no opportunity to maximize returns from their land by clearing and thinning tree cover. These landholders have been unfairly penalized by keeping trees.

Wood lots have become so thick with re-growth, which often leads to a monoculture that has no environmental benefit nor does it sustain a viable grazing regime.

Landholders pay the same rates on all their land regardless of tree cover and productivity.

Productivity largely hinges on using the land, in a timely manner to achieve viable results from Best Management Practices. Tree cover impinges on the options farmers have for their landuse.

Trees use valuable moisture from surrounding crops and there is no better illustration of this than when the season becomes dry. Bare earth can be seen hundreds of meters out from the trees well clear of the canopy. Meanwhile crops further a field are still producing.

Thick areas of bush land and tree cover become harbor for feral animals such as pigs, cats and foxes. They not only decimate crops and livestock they have a major impact on Native species.

Land use needs to take account of current market trends and changing opportunities. Decisions on land use and cropping need to be made to suit the prevailing climatic conditions.

Native vegetation laws, changing water regimes and political ideals have limited the autonomy of land owners to make the best use of their land. Landholders can no longer manage their agricultural enterprise to make the best business decisions for their circumstances.

Banks and lenders are not interested in the eco systems on a property. Production and maintaining viability are the only consideration; therefore, the wonders of various ecosystems can be a major deterrent to financing an agricultural enterprise.

The proponents and administrators of the Native Vegetation act have little or no understanding of

agriculture and animal husbandry. Often they have idealist views, which have no relationship with the realities of Primary Production. Nor do they understand the enormous variation in soils, vegetation and climate of the .Australian landscape. Even the changes in soil types and vegetation within a farm seems to escape them. Administrators have no sense of urgency to process applications swiftly.

b) For those landholders with uncleared land there has been no compensation. They are enormously disadvantaged in the market place. They do not have full use of their holding. Their neighbors with cleared land have all the choices for their enterprise, and a significant advantage borrowing money or selling their land.

Compensation must be significant and ongoing.

Agriculture should not be penalized for the pollution made by society and industries far removed from rural Australia.

d)

Truth in zoning must be invoked.

Land zoned and rated as agricultural must mean it as a whole can be run as an agricultural business. Currently there is no guarantee for landholders that they have the right, to fully use f their land.

Grasslands are a legitimate ecosystem. Trees are for shade, shelter, roosting and nesting. Grasslands particularly on the plains country are where animals feed. Without substantial open country both native and domestic species cannot survive.

Native vegetation laws are cumbersome, confusing and penalize those with un-cleared land. They are a time consuming burden that agriculture does not need if it is to supply food and fibre for and ever increasing and voracious population.