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Chair
Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee
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CANBERRA ACT 2600

Submission to Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee – Native Vegetation Laws, Greenhouse Gas Abatement and Climate Change Measures Inquiry

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Occupation: Farmer

1. Development Phase

My wife and I with two sons involved in the business, run several cattle enterprises in the Fitzroy Basin in Central Queensland.

I was born on the very edge of the catchment on a small brigalow property near Wandoan. I bought the family property of 1290 acres which I developed with the country fully protected by contour banks and all shade patches in place for stock protection. It also featured a small, 150 megalitre on farm irrigation dam for production and drought mitigation which today, 50 years later is still being used.

In 1971 we drew, at ballot, an 8000 ha area 3 brigalow block at Marlborough, Qld. We were required to submit a plan to develop all the brigalow on the property.

We cleared and grassed the country in a staged programme as time and finances permitted until 1998 when the government foreshadowed stopping all land clearing.

We purchased heavy machinery and for twelve months cleared all the country that was feasible.

Given a choice, some of this land probably would never have been cleared.

It is just an example of how the fear of compulsion will lead to perverse outcomes.

This situation could be extrapolated all over Queensland.

This kind of outcome was generated on the three occasions that the government, up for re-election signalled that they were going to further tighten land clearing laws, now, right down to resuming so-called endangered regrowth.

2. Development Hiatus

Government departments up until the end of the last century that oversaw and advised on sustainable orderly development were dismantled and became highly restrictive enforcement agencies while administration of the new laws was seriously underfunded and under resourced.

The vegetation mapping developed to administer the Vegetation Act has been hopelessly inaccurate and getting changes without employing a consultant to generate a full blown costly PMAV (Property Map of Assessable Vegetation) almost impossible.

After repeated requests for ground truthing, our map was mysteriously changed. In fact it was made even more inaccurate. After a couple more years of agitation it was unilaterally altered again – still no better.

We spent \$3000 to get a professionally designed map eventually locked in. It is interesting that before all this started we had fenced off areas never to be pulled. We went from a mandatory plan to clear all brigalow sustainably to an unseemly war with government officers in a few years.

3. Land Locked up without Compensation

Land with a PMAV and category X is worth a premium – no PMAV and all coloured, it is totally devalued. There is a green block of 800 acres in this category just outside Rockhampton. It is completely abandoned. On one side is a highly productive irrigated dairy farm, a piggery on another, a strawberry farm and an irrigated cattle property also adjoining.

It is a haven for vermin and weeds and of little value to anyone. The potential for food production of irrigable land like this is, if cleared, obviously enormous.

We have a thousand acres of riparian river blue gum locked up. This land is all irrigable; we have the water allocations and pumps in place. We applied for the \$100,000 compensation offered but were refused on the grounds that less than 30% of the original timber of this description survives in our area. At some stage this land has the potential to produce food of incalculable value.

There is a major irrigation development on the other side of the river a few kilometres upstream. The drop in value of our land locked up would be \$2.5m without calculating the possible reduction in food production.

The Queensland government has recognised that mining should not occur on prime land but has prime irrigable country permanently locked up by tree clearing bans. World practice is for 10% retention of ecosystems. Because of flawed negotiations and compromises with ambit claims of 80% from the extreme environmental lobby we've wound up with 30% retention rates.

People in the African continent are watching busy Chinese working around the clock developing their resources for Chinese use. When the world gets hungry enough we may have the same experience.