

SUBMISSION TO SENATE FINANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

SUBJECT NATIVE VEGETATION LAWS , GREENHOUSE GAS ABATEMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE MEASURES.

NAME AND CONTACT DETAILS TO BE WITHHELD

OVERVIEW

Greenhouse gas abatement - climate change

(1) My first comment about this portion of the Senate inquiry is its relevance to the science associated with greenhouse gases and climate change. Scientists of various persuasions cannot agree whether the present situation is abnormal or a natural interval of cyclic variation.

Even nations of the world at Copenhagen could not come to an agreement on a practical approach to help control the environment.

Therefore the action of our Government to embark on a programme of adopting measures to claim the trees that sequester carbon from rural property owners especially those with freehold title, with no consultation can only be classed as DICTATORIAL.

Over the Nation there are a multiplicity of National Parks, State Forests, Botanical Gardens ,Arboretums etc. with an abundance of trees just as capable of carbon sequestration.

(2)

The Native Vegetation Act (NVA) is based on outdated data in that recent research by Government Depts. Has shown that the same amount of carbon can be sequestered by rich organic soil with active soil biota.(see main submission).

This insidious law, based on deceit over many years in its making , is really having a devastating effect on the farmers/primary producers who have invested in an agricultural project either as an operational unit or as a development project with potential to produce an income and provide food and fibre for the nation by borrowing finance.

Were the banks consulted and advised of the fact that the properties on which they had lent finance would be devalued and the capacity to service the loan would be diminished as a result of the restrictions placed on the farmers by the NVA.

There was no consultation with the farmers and none were advised of the impact of the NVA on their property investment . This draconian law must be revoked in its entirety and re-addressed for administering in a more equitable manner not just penalising farmers for the care of the environment WHICH WE ALL SHARE AND SHOULD CONTRIBUTE TO.

My wife and I appreciate the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry into Native Vegetation Law. We are also conveying the sentiments of the many thousands of farmers who are unaware of this inquiry (or are too busy farming to send a submission).

We were only advised on the 6/3/10 that this inquiry was being held - the closing date being 5/3/10. NSW Farmers Association were able to obtain an extension of time to 17/3/10.

Farmers are usually too tired and too busy working 12 - 15 hours 7 days a week to put in submissions - even to read the paper and find the small advertisement notification. You will observe that modern society/organisations/ Government bodies advise that it is our responsibility to be informed. We consider this a "cop out" because of the multiplicity of organisations which directly affect the every day operations of the farm. Time is required to work and occasionally sleep.

We will also be sending submissions to the Native Vegetation Framework Draft and the Senate Inquiry into Rural Suicide as they are all interconnected.

COMPARISON OF FARMER TO URBAN DWELLER.

On the current minimum block sizes for city, urban and regional subdivisions, massive houses are being constructed with massive financial outlay using huge amounts of material often in an exotic manner with all environmental unfriendly mod-cons and having a huge mortgage which necessitates the house being empty all day while the occupants go to work to be paid on a regular basis.

Farmers do not have the luxury of being paid on a regular basis, particularly if their property is affected by the NVA. They are not allowed to develop their freehold land to its earning capacity, all the while having to continue to pay their mortgage, rates, insurance, LHPA dues and infrastructure erection and repairs etc on land they cannot fully utilize even in drought or flood.

Urban dwellers are often eligible for "the first home owners grant" of up to \$24,000. Farmers are given no such assistance.

Urban residence values increase over time producing nothing but producing greenhouse gases. Farms are being devalued by the NVA even though they are capable of producing food and sequestering carbon.

A property adjoining ours has been valued at approx. \$4,000,000. It is now unsaleable as potential buyers are advised by the CMA that the previously very productive property can no longer be utilized to its previous productivity. There are hundreds of other properties on the market, because the farmers can no longer earn enough to service their loan and make a living because of the NVA. Our properties of 1069ha which we have owned for 22 years have been reduced to the value of a hunting block for city-centric ethnics whose biggest aim in life is to be the owner of a powerful gun with which to shoot all wildlife - even little birds. Fires are also started by them causing loss of vegetation and wildlife habitat.

Our local Government LEP will "if approved" allow farmers to sell off parts of their properties they are unable to utilize because of the NVA to get some cash flow - if anyone is PREPARED TO BUY IT.

Our farming techniques are required to change so we can produce more with less land and water - does this apply to the urban dweller? No.

Any financial incentive for the farmer usually comes with a catch and further expense in time, money and work and often giving the Government more control of the land in the form of a caveat. We also have to provide money and time to attend courses, field days etc. to further our knowledge of conservation farming and soil biology..

Compare the urbanised situation of water usage where millions of litres of water is flushed down toilets in clubs, high rise buildings, gardens, parks etc. They even have in Sydney a "de-salination plant" supplying water to selected suburbs. It is interesting to note that all this wasted water including storm water goes out to sea only to be recycled as "de-salinated water" - environmentally friendly?

The NVA is obviously biased towards the urbanites and not the farming sector. The urbanised sprawl is spreading its tentacles to encompass all the good alluvial soils originally used as farm lands and market gardens. These previous farms when re-zoned have all vegetation and topsoil stripped, are covered with concrete and asphalt and bricks etc. Native grasses and trees are replaced with imported lawn grasses which are regularly taken to create more gas emitting landfill at the tips - all in the name of progress. No NVA to affect them.

These urban developments create massive heat sinks requiring large ducted air-conditioning units in the dwellings, more fumes from vehicles, masses of garbage for landfill and the majority of water running off and being wasted.

Mining is apparently exempt from affects of NVA except when restoring some semblance of native vegetation many years down the track, after the land has been totally destroyed. In gold mining the usage of masses of water also occurs. In coal mining the water aquifers are emptied with unknown future consequences.

You cannot eat coal or minerals but because they bring vast financial gain to the nation they are given carte blanche to do as they please to the environment. THE FARMER CANNOT.

Farmers/orchardists/vignerons etc. have to meet strict quality controls and traceability. Chemical usage has to be closely monitored. When the last farmer has been forced to walk off his land because of the effects of the NVA will you enjoy eating all imported food that has been irradiated, is full of chemicals that no Australian farmer is permitted to use? That is the future for us all if this law is allowed to continue.

By now I hope the magnitude of the imbalance that exists between urban dwellers and the farmers whose plight has aroused the Senators to address their conscience to examine more deeply the damage their past decisions have caused. Hopefully it has caused some soul searching about how much more the farmers can handle.

My wife and I recently completed a course on Farm Planning put on by the CMA in conjunction with the Western Institute of TAFE. We had hoped to improve our farming skills and increase our knowledge. Unfortunately it proved to be a total disaster as during each lesson we were told that we were unable to legally do any normal farming practices that had been taught for many years by the Dept. of agriculture. It is totally soul-destroying to be told that we and others cannot do anything to improve OUR OWN FREEHOLD LAND AND THAT THE EYE IN THE SKY WOULD BE MONITORING OUR ACTIONS down to a square metre. If we dared to do anything contrary to the NVA we would be convicted by satellite imagery and receive massive fines.

We had to complete the course as we would have been compelled to pay the full price of the course. We were both completely traumatised by the outcome having been told that our investment had become worthless and that we are now UNABLE TO MAKE A LIVING AS PLANNED, because of the NVA.

My wife has been treated for depression since doing the course and I am finding it very hard to cope in spite of us both still loving farming and trying to live productive lives in spite of being in our 70s.

Is it any wonder that so many farmers have been pushed over the edge and families broken up because they can no longer earn enough on their farm to service their debt and survive financially. Hundreds have been pushed into suicide and there will be many more if this discriminatory NVA is not revoked. It is totally pointless for the Government throwing a bit of money around to put Depression meetings on for the farmers saying "It is the Drought that's causing it" The drought has been stressful, but the biggest cause of rural depression is the NVA and the knowledge that no matter how hard you work your property has lost value and the earning capacity is greatly lowered.

COMPENSATION

How can compensation be measured for losing capital value, earning capacity loss of family members

and health because of the undue stress placed on the farming families? Not only should compensation be paid to cover loss of capital value and earning capacity for many years but if our carbon credits are to have a market value farmers are entitled to the ongoing income. After all THEY ARE OUR CARBON CREDITS CREATED ON OUR LAND.

The farmers are not the only ones who are responsible for the environment. The environment is shared by us all and the responsibility for it MUST BE SHARED.

CONCLUSION

In my submission I hope I have convinced the Committee of the devastating effect on only the farming community. It is definitely biased against the farmers. Unfortunately the Government has had to rely on the anti-farmer Green vote to pass legislation which suits their agenda. The farmers have been made the sacrificial lamb to make Australia look good in the eyes of the world yet no other countries have sacrificed their farmers rights in such a manner.

COMPENSATION - Why does the "Terms of reference" assume that we as farmers are aware of the appropriateness of the method of calculation of asset value. When a method is determined it must be presented to farmers for their consideration. It must also be presented to the Senate for Review.

We must be told clearly of any legal implication of any such compensation offered and if it will involve caveats, reduction in property size and usage. Again how will the lending bodies react to their investment in the farming sector when the values of properties are altered with possible loss of original entitlement.

As a result of the compensation, responsibility must be determined for maintaining on going fire prevention and control, costs of insurance, weed control, fence maintenance dams and tracks for firefighting access etc. The Government surely has no right to force farmers to accept responsibility for maintenance on land they cannot use effectively.

This heinous NVA must be revoked and re-written. We rely on the Senate to protect the interests of the farming community in this matter. It affects not only the farmers but the surrounding towns and villages with the resulting loss of schools, medical services, shops, transport etc.

Again I re-iterate that if the NVA is not revoked, just compensation must be paid to farmers in three forms (1) compensation for loss of capital value (2) compensation for loss of on-going income and (3) compensation in the form of on-going carbon credits from both vegetation and soil.

Farmers must be advised direct of any proposed changes to Legislation. Hiding small notices that will affect our future in the back pages of newspapers that not all farmers get or can afford is not good enough.

As we have already lost the mineral rights from under the topsoil, most of the water which falls on the property, the native vegetation growing on the property will the topsoil which has been sequestering carbon also be lost to Government ownership. Will we still be able to use the air as that is all that will be left to pay a mortgage on. Are taxes for breathing next?

Do we finally lose all our farms when soil carbon sequestration is accepted, along with our trees and we end up with a debt on a farm we don't have?

We rely on the Senate as a House of review to protect the interests of the citizens in particular the farmers in this particular situation.