

Dear Senator

I am writing to you in your role as a member or participating member of the Senate's Finance and Public Administration – References Committee, with respect to its current deliberations and Inquiry on Native Vegetation Laws etc. I might add that I made a personal submission to that Inquiry, although it has not yet appeared on the Inquiry web site (Please note: there could be sound logistical reasons for this due to the unusual format of my submission).

In my submission I thought it was very important and highly relevant to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference for the Committee membership to understand the reality of vegetation thickening, over the huge area of grazed woodlands in Northern Australia, and the fact that this phenomenon was ongoing. Accordingly, my submission was largely evidenced based with numerous illustrations and citations provided from scientific, technical and historical literature, to convince readers to that effect. The widespread banning of tree clearing and associated regrowth control bans thus limits productivity improvements and/or actually lowers productivity in grazed woodlands both now, and even more so in the future, because of this ongoing thickening. It also has many deleterious hydrological and biodiversity impacts that are mostly glossed over or ignored by proponents of the bans.

In a final section of my submission I turned to addressing carbon accounting issues in grazed woodlands and agricultural lands generally. I expressed great concerns about our ability to accurately and practically account for carbon fluxes in these systems. In such situations I highlighted the central role of soil carbon and the ability for unscrupulous “carbon accountants” to manipulate trends in soil carbon and, by implication, the difficulty carbon auditors would have in substantiating claims of changes that have occurred.

Subsequent to my submission a science colleague who still works for a government agency in this country has circulated friends and associates with a disturbing elaboration of my concerns. These have been copied by me and are included in the attached document. Although there is an element of cynicism expressed in this document one should be cognisant of the fact that it was compiled post the “insulation scheme” rip-offs, which all Senators would be aware have impacted on the perceptions of governance by the population at large, including the scientists therein. The real point is that my colleague has effectively compiled a soil carbon scammers handbook. You would have to be completely naive if you believed that any Australian soil carbon accounting which led to \$\$ being transferred would not be potentially subject to many, or all of these manipulations.

This late contribution to your deliberations is therefore by way of a cautionary statement before the Committee endorses in its Report any carbon credit or offset program, fully or partially reliant on claimed ‘measured’ changes in soil carbon content – whatever timeframe may be involved. [And for that matter whatever country may seek to claim it in any future international agreement!].

Thanks for your consideration.

Sincerely  
Bill Burrows