

Submission

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

This submission has been prepared by Joe Holmes, 47yrs old, Farmer.

As per the inquiry terms of reference this submission deals with the impact of the NSW native vegetation laws on me.

Specifically section

(a) Any diminution of land asset value and productivity as a result of such laws;

I have been involved with the land all my working life of 31 years, and three generations before me. We have successfully managed the challenges that evolved, most of this meant implementing land management strategies that led to extremely productive and sustainable outcomes, which I am convinced achieved an excellent balance between production and conservation. The implementation of the native vegetation legislation has seen primary land management issues completely ignored to suit someone else's pseudo agenda/outcomes. Experience on the ground recognises the disastrous effect this has at the land area level, with land valuations directly reflecting this. As land was allocated in the early settlement of this area per a living area, to impose a restriction on any part of that area is a direct restriction of trade.

(b) compensation arrangements to landholders resulting from the imposition of such laws

To date I am not aware of any attempt to get any sort of balance, let alone compensation. The Big Stick approach is in place and government bureaucrats only a few of them very efficient and ruthless in their application have been placed in key roles. Case in Point: One Department of Land & Water Conservation Regional Director negotiated a farm plan recognising best practice land management reflecting a combined 70 years of experience, contentious case (alleged land clearing). To deal with this issue the Department sacked 5 Regional Directors and the Western Lands Commissioner to centralise control. Compliance officers employ storm trooper tactics at Warren NSW with unannounced Sunday morning property inspections, illegal entry climbing over locked gates and intimidation of landowners, all sanctioned by the Minister.

(c) the appropriateness of the method of calculation of asset value in the determination of compensation arrangements;

I believe if a degree of accountability was introduced and if State & Federal planning process had to justify to the taxpayer Just Terms compensation to any Australian affected by this land acquisition and restriction of use, not just farmers, any asset resumed or deemed for the benefit of the Public Good. Anything stamped with the title 'Environmental Benefit of the State' is all the justification the government needs to lock it up with no appeal process. I suggest a commercial lease over the area that the restrictions apply to that reflects a landowner's forgone opportunity for the benefit of the state or commonwealth.

(d) any other related matter

Consider this: I have always wondered what drives these agendas – tree propagation lock up mentality in the proportions proposed have an unquestionable detrimental effect on soil health and sustainability. Carbon sequestration – I recently had three scientists with me inspecting a scrubby block of land, they spent their time convincing me of the benefits of carbon sequestration lock up. I put this question to them: Does carbon, can carbon leave the atmosphere? Their scientific answer: No. Doesn't this fact render the rest of the debate bullshit? Carbon has its own cycle and finds its own balance in a natural or altered environment.

The use of selective science to suit a particular agenda has been such a part of this process that in itself has condemned any outcomes arrived at a dismal failure. I was involved from the start with community stakeholder regional vegetation committees and after three years negotiated a plan that had regional support and acceptance. Having witnessed five departmental name changes, 7 Ministerial changes, it was quite apparent that this process was designed not to work. That plan, as far as I know, still sits on the Minister's desk waiting approval.

The questionable ethics that have been employed to achieve these agendas have really made me wonder what the hell is at stake. How does an individual defend themselves against an overwhelming government agenda where you find yourself guilty until proven innocent?

I thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

Yours sincerely

Joe Holmes