

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: IMPACTS OF NATIVE VEGETATION & BIODIVERSITY REGULATIONS
ISSUES PAPER

This submission is in response to the negative impacts native vegetation has had on farming practices, productivity, sustainability, landholders' investments and rural communities. We contribute our experience to give an accurate account of the adverse effects of native vegetation regulation.

IMPACTS ON LANDHOLDERS AND REGIONAL COMMUNITIES

The *Native Vegetation Act 1997* has detrimental effects on farm businesses, farm management, landholders' investments and rural communities. Major impacts of this act have been:

Farm businesses subjected to discouraging regulation. Over regulation of land clearing means uncertainty to land accessibility. For any farm business this jeopardises its productivity and in turn, reduces farm profitability.

Alterations to sustainable farm management. Farmers need to manage their land properly in order to remain viable. This means farmers need to make decisions based on good economics and sustainable land use. Diminished managing power due to over regulation by the government creates loss of incentive and initiative.

Specifically, a farmer may decide on clearing land to:

- Improve soil – eg. soil acidity is neutralised by applying lime; fertilising increases soil productivity; and growing legumes increases soil organic matter.
- Increase production by increasing stock carrying capacity.
- Enhance farm investment and business for farming families, the district and the future.

When a farmer has the resources and finances to clear land – good farm management means that windbreaks and ample shade are left. Sound clearing practices ensure that clearing is done under proper conditions and that there is follow-up management of regrowth.

What is being cleared now is native uninhabitable regrowth not native woodland. Areas of land subjected to unmanaged regrowth neither sustain nor enhance the environment. When farmers are able to make viable decisions to clear land like this – the environment, as well as farm businesses and rural districts benefit.

Discourages landholders' investment. Productive land in the Central West, NSW has a carrying capacity averaging a Dry Stock Equivalent (DSE) of 5-10 to the hectare. An area of native vegetation scrub (regrowth) has a carrying capacity of only 1 DSE to 50 hectares. The latter figure does not make an attractive investment for landholders. Without opportunities and incentives to invest, farm businesses are limited in their development and growth.

Stagnates business and growth in rural communities. The impact of native vegetation clearing regulation has many adverse effects beyond the farm gate. If growth and productivity of a farm are diminished, the flow-on effect to the larger rural community means businesses, contractors, labourers and financial services will suffer.

IMPACTS ON THE ENVIRONMENT

The *Native Vegetation Act 1997* has many adverse effects on the rural environment. The lack of native vegetation clearing imposes difficulties in the eradication of feral animals and is disastrous to bushfire management.

Feral animals. Vermin such as feral dogs, feral pigs and feral goats are detrimental to the environment and to farming enterprises. Wild dogs destroy stock, wild pigs destroy crops and pollute watercourses, and wild goats can carry diseases such as Footrot and Ovine Johnes Disease.

Bushfire control. The inhospitable nature of dense, unmanaged vegetation means that proper bushfire management becomes impossible. This has disastrous consequences for people, their homes, their assets and communities.

CONCLUSION

The present over regulation of native vegetation clearing has many negative impacts on farm businesses, rural communities and the rural environment. Farmers and graziers need to have complete control in the management of their own land to ensure their long-term security and viability. Environmental reforms that are incentive-based rather than regulatory, would have a positive impact in farm management. For example, resources could be made available for the planting of shade trees and windbreaks. This would replace trees lost to lightning strike and dieback.

In conclusion, native vegetation clearing in rural areas needs to sustain productivity, sustain rural communities and allow for proper farm management, both economically and environmentally.

Yours faithfully.

Peter Gallagher