

Submission to Inquiry into Native Vegetation Laws, Greenhouse Gas Abatement and Climate Change Measures

To: Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee

From: Janet Cox

Background

With my husband, I farm on the _____, which is part of the Darling Downs in Queensland and currently threatened with mining. We are proud of our profession, and we are proud of our address. We feed the world, and we do it on one of the most inherently productive floodplains in the world. My husband is a fourth generation farmer of more than fifty years experience, and we have two adult sons, one of which is a qualified fitter and turner, who are also farmers. I also have a farming background through my mothers family although I grew up in cities. I have a background in banking, but sustainable production of healthy food is my pride.

We are graingrowers on some of the most inherently fertile and productive ground in Australia, and indeed the world.

I am deeply concerned at the path being taken that is insidiously undermining our rights as landholders.

Submission

Our property is used solely for the production of grain. This country was originally covered with brigalow and belah scrub that in time was over-run by prickly pear. Early settlers were predominantly dairy farmers who did battle with this menace until the advent of the cactoblastis moth. However the moth never eradicated the pest, only brought it under control.

In time the dairy farms gave way to grain production which meant that country was gradually cleared of the vegetation and pear. This country, unless cleared, is virtually un-usable as the timber grows so very thickly that no grass will grow beneath the trees. Once cleared the country has come into its own as one of the most productive and inherently fertile farming areas in the State of Queensland and Australia. The farmers who work this country guard it very closely knowing that it is matchless and also knowing that to rape it in any way is against their own interests. The very nature of the country ensures that it will survive and be looked after as long as it is recognised for what it is.....the very best.

Because of native vegetation laws, on our property we have been left with areas of trees which are useless in every sense except as a harbour for weeds and feral animals. The landholder is expected to pay rates, and spend time and money on

something that is entirely useless to him not because he has chosen to leave these areas untouched but because he is forbidden by law. This is also freehold land but any choice of how to manage this country is denied the farmer. In a cropping area there is diminution of available cultivated land through the encroachment of tree roots into the cultivation which can reduce productivity enormously on the ground available.

The feral animals, (cats, foxes, pigs, rabbits) breed and inhabit these areas. In smaller farming areas where property sizes are not huge the impact of this lost productivity impacts on viability. The pigs are extremely destructive in cultivated crops as there is nothing they like more than grain. They eat the seed as it is planted and also have a feast when it comes out in head. Kangaroos move into areas, previously relatively free of them, where they have the daytime cover of the trees and then decimate huge areas of crop at night because a food supply is laid on. The same applies to cockatoos where the trees provide very convenient roosting for laid on restaurant facilities.

When locked up in this manner, these blocks of native vegetation contribute to the increase in the populations of feral animals at the cost of our native wildlife – birds and small vertebrates.

Farmers spend much time and money trying to control weeds in their crops but find they are spreading from these vegetated areas because it is difficult to control weeds in these situations. Prickly pear also seems to be on the increase again. Tiger pear is another nasty which I have seen protruding from the eyes of animals.

I believe these trees cannot even be used for carbon credits should this ever eventuate. Surely there is more sense in leaving vegetation native to the area for carbon credits than clearing it and planting with some other variety.

I believe also that there will be huge issues effecting the viability of irrigation farming that relies on the upper aquifers once dewatering occurs in conjunction with coal seam gas extraction. Water cannot be extracted in the quantities proposed without detrimental effects on the entire underground water system. Somehow this water has to be replenished and it is often at the expense of the farmer through loss of productivity caused by the inability to access his normal water supply. It will cause devaluation of his property. The extraction rate in the Tummaville to Warra alluvium is being cut from 66,000 megalitres to 40,000 megalitres per annum because the State Government believes it to be unsustainable, while there are gas companies proposing far greater extraction rates on top of these. The report commissioned by the State Government acknowledges that this dewatering will have an impact on the upper aquifers as do Origin and Santos

The impacts of gas wells could also see a fall in valuations of properties because the placement of wells may not be what suits the farmer but is what the companies desire regardless of the long term effects. As this water mostly has a high salt content, there is the possibility of irreparable damage to the farmers land should there be an accident.

Insidiously, as time goes by the farmer finds himself not in control of what is rightfully his and he is left with somebody else's mess and an asset which has gradually been devalued.

These issues need to be addressed and steps taken to ensure the landholder has control of his property.

Thankyou for your time taken reading this article.

Janet Cox