

***Introductory Presentation by the Carbon Sense Coalition to the
Senate Enquiry into Native Vegetation Laws,
and Greenhouse Gas and Climate Change Measures.***

Rockhampton 9 April 2010

I represent the Carbon Sense Coalition.

We oppose pollution, we oppose the waste of resources but we promote the rational and sustainable use of carbon energy and carbon food. We maintain that carbon dioxide is NOT a pollutant and there is no evidence that it controls global climate.

Our submission covers the question of using legislation to control vegetation, greenhouse gases and climate. We do not believe there are any benefits in such proposals, and considerable costs and unfavourable consequences.

This is a huge subject and we have no chance of covering it all today, so I will just summarise very briefly the likely effect of legislation in five areas – climate, the environment, food production, property rights and values, and Constitutional matters.

1. The Effect of Vegetation Laws on Climate

We have four main points here:

- Carbon dioxide does not control temperature - rather temperature controls carbon dioxide. All climate models neglect the elephant in the room, which is the vast ocean containing huge amounts of carbon dioxide in solution. Ocean temperatures are largely controlled by the sun, by cyclic variations in the solar system, and by undersea volcanoes. Whenever the ocean warms, it expels carbon dioxide. When it cools again it absorbs carbon dioxide. Man is a bystander in this grand climate cycle of warm eras and ice ages.
- Man does not control carbon dioxide - nature does. There is a natural carbon cycle that has existed since the earth was formed, and which will still be acting long after the last bit of coal is burnt by men. Wildlife, vegetation, volcanoes and the oceans are far more significant than all of man's activities in moving carbon dioxide between oceans, the biosphere and the atmosphere – maybe 30 times more significant.
- Even if man's production of carbon dioxide was significant, Australia's contribution is miniscule and largely irrelevant.

- Finally, on the matter of climate, trees do not control the amount of carbon dioxide in the air, in fact the reverse is true – the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere determines the growth rate of trees. Over the life of a tree, its effect on carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is ZERO. Trees are not a permanent carbon sink – like all life, they borrow it for a while and give it back.

2. The Effect of Vegetation Laws on the Environment

These laws are loosely and wrongly referred to as “Native Vegetation Protection”. They are not. They are “Tree Protection Laws”. They will protect trees and woody weeds of all types, native and exotic, at the expense of grasses and pastures. They do not help to restore the landscape to some past status because in many grassland areas, there are already more eucalypt trees now than there were when Captain Cook sailed up the Queensland coast.

We have known since Cook’s day that fire created the aboriginal grassland landscapes. Are we trying to restore the landscape to some mythical wooded pre-aboriginal state?

Every bit of land is currently in use – it is covered by trees, grasses, cultivated land or man’s infrastructure. We cannot increase them all at the same time – we can only increase one at the expense of others.

Has the Senate considered carefully which land use they are prepared to sacrifice to eucalypts and woody weeds? I agree with Peter Andrews – eucalypts should not receive government protection - it is more appropriate to class some eucalypts as “Weeds of National Significance”. Better still, let every landowner decide.

Is it sensible to see rural communities becoming unpopulated forests of untouchable and unproductive trees? As landowners give up and move, and small towns die, is increasing urbanisation and centralisation a benefit to Australia? Every legislative change has environmental and social effects.

Eucalypts are even contributors to air pollution and greenhouse gases and encourage fires – they emit hydrocarbon air pollutants and are the source of the Blue Haze that gave the Blue Mountains their name? These natural aerosols, and the oils in many eucalypt leaves, are flammable. This leads some people to call eucalypts ‘Fire Trees’.

3. The Effect of Tree Protection Laws and Other Climate Measures on Food Production.

Every significant human society on every continent has obtained most of its food from open country – the plants and grazing animals of the grasslands and open forests. And every society has fought the trees for grassland space, mainly using fires, and more recently machinery. Like Triffids, trees sneak up on every landowner, destroying grass, harbouring weeds pests and predators, and increasing the danger of destructive fires right on his doorstep.

When tree protection laws are combined with other silly policies like subsidised ethanol production and carbon credit forests, where is our future food to come from?

4. The Effect of Tree Protection Laws on Property Rights and Property Values.

Ask any rural valuer what is the main factor that sets the base value of rural land, and he will tell you in an instant - "Carrying Capacity" (and he is not talking about the population of eucalypts.) Rural land is valued on the basis of its sustainable yield of saleable products. Naturally some trees are of value to landowners, but uncontrolled spreading of eucalypt weeds is a value destroyer. As carrying capacity falls, so does the property value which is underpinning property debt.

One thing distinguishes humane societies from barbaric ones – how well the rulers respect the rights of peaceful individuals to hold and use their property. Some landowners have already been forced into bankruptcy or driven to depression and even suicide by these draconian laws. This is a barbaric legacy.

5. Constitutional Questions

All humane societies try to prevent dictators from arbitrary seizure of justly acquired property from peaceful citizens. The Australian Constitution even has a clause prohibiting the seizure of property without paying just compensation.

Governments have destroyed land values and have seized possible carbon credits with their Kyoto inspired Tree Protection laws.

And they have conspired with state governments to devise a devious scheme whereby the states manage to evade the Constitutional requirement to pay compensation for land values destroyed and carbon credits seized. This is a retrograde step deserving widespread condemnation.

Finally, What Should be Done?

It is our conclusion that all attempts to apply one blunt tree protection law to every property are certain to bring more harm than good. There will be no effect on global temperature, no environmental benefits, destruction of rural communities, hostility and lack of co-operation from landowners and a reduced capacity to produce food. All properties are different and landowners are best placed to decide what is best for maintaining or enhancing the value their land. Our major recommendations are:

- The Senate should promote the immediate repeal of the Tree Protection Legislation as well as all other climate control measures which encourage the un-natural spread of trees and woody weeds.
- Landowners who have been harmed by these poorly considered measures should be compensated.
- The Commonwealth should be prevented from conspiring with the states to defeat the intent of the Australian Constitution with regard to paying fair compensation for property seizures or destruction of property values.

Viv Forbes
Chairman, The Carbon Sense Coalition

The Original Submission to the Senate Enquiry can be found at:
<http://carbon-sense.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/grass-trees-climate-food.pdf>