

Senate Inquiry

Native Vegetation Laws, Greenhouse Gas Abatement and Climate Change Measures

Submission From;

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was purchased in the early 1980s to be used for cropping and grazing. Its title was perpetual lease. It is just less than 4000 acres in size and was approximately one third cleared and two thirds timbered. Approval was soon after given to clear more country and about another one third was cleared. It could be seen that the timbered areas had previously been used to supply local sawmills or sleeper cutters with logs, which was a common practice in the area. The remaining one-third timber was going to be kept as timber to be able to continue this practice when things were hard like in drought times.

This happened in the mid 1990s and permission was gained from Forestry and Lands Departments to log the timbered areas again on a sustainable basis. This logging we did ourselves, initially selling these logs to local mills, but later purchasing a portable mill and milling these logs ourselves. The Forestry Department and the Lands Department were obviously quite happy with how we were going about this process or they would have had us in court to prosecute us for over logging and not doing things in a sustainable way. I know this would have been the case as during this time I purchased a small run down local sawmill in Mendooran with a couple of mates with the idea of getting logs from other local farmers with timbered areas as there were many of these in the area which used to be used by sleeper cutters but were now not being utilized. We mostly had these farmers supply the logs themselves but if they weren't able to we organized to get their logs ourselves. In one case around 2003 2004 after one day taking about six tonne of logs off a property I had a phone call from the Natural Resources Department asking why we were getting logs around the area. I said we were only doing what we were allowed to do on a sustainable basis. Three inspectors were sent out to check and they let me know that it was ok and we could do more. I still got a letter from them stating that while all was ok if we took one log to many it could cost us a fine of \$1.1 million. Things had obviously changed and the department had received new directives to scare people into less and less logging. It worked and we didn't keep the mill in Mendooran for much longer and went back to only periodically doing our own timber on "Wolaroi" with the portable mill.

This continued until recently when things changed here also to prevent any logging continuing. A number of years ago the NSW Government decided that they wanted landowners with leasehold titles to freehold them. This was a change of direction as we had tried a couple of times before this to freehold and were unable. When this happened we applied as it was said that if you didn't apply then the lease payment would increase substantially. They also said that farms would be assessed and if not approved then the lease payments would remain at their current levels.

In our case the process took about four years and at the end they said that it could all be converted to freehold but that there would be a caveat on the timbered areas and they could not be touched. We could decide to not go ahead with the freehold conversion but then we would have the rent increase. We could not afford that so we agreed and went ahead but now have no access to be able to use any of the timber but still pay rates etc on this area.

There had obviously been a directive change from above as the person who did the inspection for the Department of Natural Resources for the freehold conversion was the same person who had given the permission a number of years earlier to log the timbered areas on a sustainable basis. These changes have meant a reduction of earning capacity of this and other similar farms in the area with nothing by way of compensation. In our case with the changes to the Native Vegetation Laws we were not wanting to clear more country but we were wanting to be able to continue to cut timber from our timbered areas on a sustainable basis but are now no longer able to thereby reducing the earning capacity of and as a result no doubt reducing the asset value. .