

We would like our names and address withheld and kept confidential. Thank you.

Submission re: inquiry into impacts of vegetation laws on land owners

One of the first things I would like to address is the issue of ownership – people do not go into the bank and ask for a loan on the premise of holding a property, the bank would laugh at them, they go in and get the loan based on the fact that they will have ownership of it. We own the land. We have the freehold title with the right to fee simple. Please give us due respect and acknowledge our ownership.

The impact the vegetation laws and their regulations have had on us have been significant. We have over the years, systematically and sustainably, been clearing and replanting our land so that we could expand our herd. But due to the removal of the 2 hectare rule, we can no longer expand our production and are even having trouble maintaining what we have, due mainly to the restriction of the steep protected land rules. We used to clear the rubbish with the dozer and burn off the piles when we knew the weather was right, now, because of the fire restrictions we have a build up of rubbish that has become a fire hazard. Financially we are worse off, as we now use a lot of herbicides to control our weed problems instead of a couple of tanks of fuel. Instead of being able to run more cattle, we are running about 1/3 down. It is difficult being viable when there are so many restrictions placed on us by both the government and our peak industry bodies.

We both work off the farm and everything we make goes back into the property, it feels like a black pit. We seem to be going backwards rapidly. Our holidays are spent working on the farm, as well as all our 'free time'. And that would be OK if we could see a light at the end of the tunnel, but every time there is a glimmer the government moves the goal post.

Stress is a large problem on the land. For a few years in a row the state government asked for submissions on the vegetation act, they always did it just before Christmas each time. We had 4 young children to contend with; school activities, meetings regarding the vegetation proposals, community committee meetings, tick eradication programs, Christmas preparations, floods, droughts and just the general farm and family trials, Oh, and we had to work as well. Let me assure there was stress!!!!!! And there still is.

Then there is the fear factor, we are told to self regulate, any normal farming activity is covered by RAMA's, but if you miscalculate a degree on your steep land or go a fraction too close to your creeks or gullies or take out too many trees from a specific areas or clear a little more than 'too the minimal extend' then we will be prosecuted - The big stick theory. Stress is part of our daily lives, and not everyone can cope with that. (I thought living in the country was supposed to be stress free.)

Farmers have been accused of 'raping the land', but from first hand knowledge I know that the only reason the country has old growth and native vegetation on private property is because the farmers are the best conservationists there are. They want to hand the land on to their children, so they look after it as best they can with what they have. Farmers work hard for very little return. There is only 3 things farmers' whinge about - the dry - the wet - and government interference.

What I would like to see happen is for the government to start looking after the farmers and protect our markets and to acknowledge our ownership of our freehold land. We have proven that we are responsible owners and can operate without government interference; the money that has been wasted on environmental issues in NSW could have been better spent in our health system.

Regards