

Submission to Senate Finance and Public Administration Inquiry into

Native Vegetation.

From Graeme and Debbie Easy.

Submission.

We own the property

Bundarra. It is a 1265ha property running sheep, wool production and cattle. We have been working this property, as Graeme's father before, adding to 62 years of ownership. As farmers we have looked after this land, - it is our livelihood and not in our best interests to be clearing everything and destroying what essentially brings us our income. If we are supposedly 'environmental vandals', then why have we still got remnant stands of Ironbarks, of which there is very few left in the Bundarra area.

The rules and regulations in regards to regrowth are somewhat of a grey area as there seems to be a differing of opinions as to what is regrowth. This 'grey area' leaves farmers open to possible prosecution or country being locked up for a period of time, or both. Even if you get (professional?) advice and go ahead to clear, another department will come along and say a totally different thing again, leaving you open to possible prosecution. If the authorities and departments can't get the guidelines all at the same level, then how are farmers supposed to know what they can do?

We have had a visit from the Department of Vegetation and Climate Change in regards to clearing that had been carried out. This was picked up by their satellite. All clearing was regrowth well within the guidelines that we understood to be correct. After their visit it took approximately four months for notification to arrive to say that we were within the guidelines. However, in this waiting period we were worried as to whether we were going to have country locked up or be prosecuted.

We also have some land that we have recently converted from lease to freehold. The restrictions with Native Vegetation legislation means that we

cannot clear much of this land, therefore meaning that we can only run a small number of stock, thus not being able to utilise the land to its full potential. With these restrictions there is a need for more country that we cannot afford, and making it harder to make a living.

Under the present Native Vegetation regulations, you cannot clear or plough any new cultivation ground. In trying to control many weeds e.g. Coolatai grass, dwarf marigold, khaki burr etc, being able to sew the ground down to pasture and use fertiliser is the only way, apart from the use of chemicals, which as people who value their land do not want to use too much of and destroy the bio-diversity. These regulations are interfering with regular farming practices.

Being unable to control, within reason, native vegetation, there is more and more growth of undesirable plants, leading to more habitats for feral animals, threatening many of our already endangered native animals. The thicker the trees and the bigger they become, the more goodness and nutrients they take from the soil. This in turn leads to much less ground cover which in turn leads to soil erosion, thus creating a huge problem on its own. No responsible farmer that cares for their land and environment would ever consider having hardly any trees. They provide many benefits for the farm and the stock and animals that live within the farm environment.

If under the Native Vegetation Act we are to be restricted so much as to what we can do in our own business and essentially be just 'tree farmers', then we need to have some form of compensation, as we are losing our ability to run the property, make an income and feed the nation. It seems more and more that the politicians are not interested in the farmers of Australia that produce the cleanest and greenest food in the world, and can supply this country with nearly every form of food required. The farmers also provide a huge monetary value to the government in exports. This will be lost to them if we cannot continue to run our farms as a viable business due to so many restrictions.

It seems that the only way farmers can receive any compensation with the Native Vegetation Act, or receive anything out of this carbon trading scheme is to plant trees. The fact that we have so many trees on our farm,

including remnant Ironbarks, Box, Stringy barks and Kurrajongs should indicate that we have been managing the property and shouldn't we be able to receive some compensation for maintaining these trees for many years beforehand as well as for future generations.

Many property owners are finding it harder and harder to maintain their production levels due to Native Vegetation Legislation. After managing and looking after the land for 62 years, we must be doing something right. Genuine farmers should be allowed to operate their farms in a productive manner so that they can lift their production rates and be viable, without being put under extra pressures by unworkable legislations.

Thank you for your consideration,

Graeme and Debbie Easy.