

17 May 2000

The Secretary,
House of Representatives
Standing Committee on
Environment and Heritage
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Inquiry into public good conservation - Impact of environmental measures imposed on landholders

I have a masters degree in Environmental Management and Development and I am the author of the WWF publication "Vegetation Clearing and Greenhouse". I have been involved in environmental campaigning for a number of years. Most of the following comments refer to land clearing.

I would like in this submission point out a limitation in the inquiry's terms of reference. It focuses on the cost of "public good conservation". This concept violates the polluter pays principle. The polluter pays principle has long been accepted internationally as the most efficient and fairest means of allocating the costs of pollution. Of course activities such as land clearing cause pollution such as emissions of greenhouse gases and salinisation.

No one has the right to destroy the global commons which the Committee has termed a public good. No one has the right to destroy biodiversity or pollute the atmosphere with greenhouse gases.

Should farmers who destroy the global commons be rewarded for the damage they have done? I think not. To pay them not to damage the public good is certainly not equitable.

To pay people not to destroy the environment has previously been characterised as compensation. Much of what has been described in the issues paper under the term cost of public good conservation is compensation by another name. However, most legal and moral authorities reject the idea that compensation should be paid for the restriction of activities such as land clearing.

Nevertheless stewardship payments are another matter. Stewardship payments are made where the landholder has to bare the cost of protecting the global commons. These can be justified on the grounds of equity.

Under no circumstances should a principle be established where compensation is paid where there has been no on ground investment. If land is prevented from being cleared there may be an argument for the land to bought from the land holder at its sale value under the original native vegetation. No payment should be made for the increased capital value of the land that may have occurred if the land was cleared as this increase in value

was purely speculative. If that value is not realised then the speculator who should bare the loss not the taxpayer or the public at large.

Yours sincerely

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