



MACQUARIE MARSHES CATCHMENT COMMITTEE

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19th May 2000

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

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: *Inquiry into the Impact of Conservation Controls imposed on Landholders*

The Macquarie Marshes Catchment Committee (MMCC) would like to thank you for the opportunity to comment to the *Inquiry into the Impact of Conservation Controls imposed on Landholders*. This committee represents landholders and other community members in the Macquarie Marshes. Due to the recognised international importance of this unique wetland this inquiry is extremely relevant to our members. Landholders in this area have seen their profitability dramatically decreased by reduced flooding due to river regulation and extractive water use, and are now being restricted from diversify into other agricultural enterprises by the implementation of new Government policies. There are a number of points/issues the MMCC would like to raise:

ECONOMIC VIABILITY

It is the experience of the MMCC that a very large majority of landholders have a strong conservation ethic and manage their rural enterprises in way that ensures the environmental values of their land are maintained. However it must also be recognised that today's rural economy it not contusive to extreme conservation practices.

The small family farm is where the impacts are felt the most. For these farmers conservation is fast becoming a luxury rather than the every day practice it should be. This situation is largely due to the implementation of new and often restrictive Government Policies/Legislation. Many of these new policies prevent landholders from diversifying or

altering management practices. In fact in some cases landholders are forced to continue with farming methods that may be damaging to their land eg. Forcing over stocking and restricting rotational farming.

It is apparent that the whole of the Australian community is becoming far more environmental and conservation conscious and this is a shift the MMCC applauds.

Many sections of the farming community have realised their methods are impacting adversely on the environment and most are doing what they can to alter those methods to more sustainable practices.

However if the Australian farming community is to survive along with the environment landholders urgently need support and assistance, not the oppressive approach as is happening at present.

Today's landholders alone cannot afford to fix the damage already done, nor should they be expected to. They are not solely responsible for the current situation. Much of the damage, including over clearing, was carried out under Government incentive programs.

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

It is evident that Governments are no longer speaking to the smaller everyday landholder. Instead they consult only with the larger, so called 'peak lobby groups' such as The National Farmers and NSW Farmers. It should never be presumed that these groups represent the majority or all sections of the farming community. It seems, to this community particularly, that such groups are being seduced by the large companies and corporations and put their views forward at the expense of grassroots landholders who once were their foundation.

When Governments seek the views and opinions of landholders, a balanced view that is, they would be far better off to hold regional seminar/information meetings which are accessible to all sections the rural community, including small family farmers.

PRACTICAL POLICY STRUCTURE

There are currently a suite of policies/regulations/legislation all aimed at various aspects of land management which were introduced with some sort of conservation objective. The biggest problem to landholders is that many of these policies etc were written/designed in isolation of other documents with no thought to interlocking them.

The implementation of policies can impact very differently in different areas of Australia eg. Different soil types, rain fall and topography means some farming methods are sustainable in some areas and not in others. These factors must be considered when writing policies which need to be more regional based rather than the very broad and general approach that is current practice. There must also be consistency in the interpretation and implementation of policies by departmental personnel.

Governments must also accept that policies relating to such issues as native vegetation and native animal management must also be practical. Practical and sustainable management of our native flora and fauna is currently non existent. In more and more counties around the world native animals particularly are managed as a renewable resource. Thus ensuring their protection while keeping numbers at a sensible and healthy level.

CONCLUSION

Conservation controls have and continue to impact on landholders. While the MMCC supports and encourages conservation and sustainable agriculture it also understands that landholders are under huge economic pressures. If Governments are serious in their conservation goals they must introduce some form of support/assistance for landholders i.e. annual environmental payments, stewardship payments etc. They must also start communicating with those who are impacted upon the most, the small family farmers.

The benefits of landholders improving the environment and becoming economically and environmentally sustainable will be felt by the whole of the Australian community. Thus it is up to everyone to contribute.

Should you wish to discuss any of the comments or wish additional information please contact myself or Sue Jones (02 6824 2097).

Yours sincerely

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