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**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Sunday, 19 August 2012 3:43 PM  
**To:** EHPP Landscapes & Ecosystems Section Mailbox  
**Subject:** AFRICAN LOVEGRASS and NATIVE VEGETATION

SUBMISSION TO THE GOVERNMENTS REVIEW OF THE NATIVE VEGETATION ACT REGULATIONS  
I wish to make the following points to the Government's review and attach a paper I have prepared on how the Act and the Regulations affect farming on Monaro.  
I have consulted widely with Monaro farmers and all have endorsed this paper.

The Native Vegetation Act (NVA) was introduced following on from the SEPP 46 regulations, as a political "deal" and its ramifications and costs in Social, Economic and Environmental terms were never thought through properly. They are becoming increasingly obvious and as such:

THE REGULATORY IMPACT STATEMENT SHOULD BE RE-DONE (and done thoroughly this time),  
SO THAT ALL THESE COSTS BECOME APPARENT TO GOVERNMENT.

The costs in administration for CMAs, (PVPs etc) and OEH with compliance, are huge and would be far better spent genuinely saving the Native Grasses from Noxious Weed invasion, especially African Lovegrass (AL).

The Native grasses are simply not strong enough to withstand the spread of African Lovegrass and only dedicated and profitable farmers have any hope of winning this war.

The Government needs to support these farmers, by ensuring that all Crown Land, whether administered by LHPAs, Councils or Government, are managed to control and eradicate this menace.

CMAs do so much good work, supporting efforts to help farmers with building Ground Cover, Conservation and Resource Management and other Community programs, that changing their focus from NVA duties to Weed Control will bring much-needed support and goodwill for CMAs in the farming community.

If there is to be a restructure of Service Delivery by Government of their many and valued services to the farming community, then I believe that CMAs with a prime focus on weed control, are an essential and fundamental requirement within the new framework.

However there should be some practical boundary realignment, to bring their boundaries closer to the Local Government boundaries.

The NVA is Counter-productive and not protecting Native Vegetation

It is destroying the trust between Government and the Farming Community, which has been built up by years of co-operation and support for farming by DPI.

Overseas experience shows clearly that over-regulation is neither good for the environment or for farming and production of food and fibre.

I would be happy to follow up these representations by personally attending the Review.

I hope that the Government will consider making the Monaro district a Pilot Program for African Lovegrass control and eradication.

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## AFRICAN LOVEGRASS & NATIVE VEGETATION

### DO WE NEED TO CHANGE OUR APPROACH?

When I started out in farming, just over 50 years ago, I was taken by my farmer/mother to a beautiful basalt farm just south of Cooma, where we were offered a line of first cross ewe lambs, which we purchased and proudly took back to our farm.

I remember what a beautiful line they were and their wool went on to top the XB wool market, (the record stood for many years), and their future lambs did likewise.

I also remember being amazed at the mat of trefoil and clover burr, which was ankle deep over much of the property, having never seen anything like it on our granite soil country.

To-day as I drive past that farm, blotches of African Lovegrass are spreading across the farm, rather like the spots on a leopard, and I realize that everybody, whose responsibility it is to contain the spread of noxious weeds, especially African Lovegrass, has totally failed yet again!

Already, within that 50 year period, the entire corridor from the ACT border to Cooma has been surrendered to the relentless march of this aggressive weed, (originally introduced into Australia by the Soil Conservation Service!)

There is no native vegetation or biodiversity left, but it is worth noting that, in the road corridor, where the RTA has established stands of phalaris in their roadworks, this is successfully holding the weed at bay.

Now, spreading south, east and west from Cooma, African Lovegrass is spreading out of control across Monaro, (with Serrated Tussock, Mintweed and other serious problems, creating real headaches as well.)

African Lovegrass is also spreading out in every direction from Dalgety and it is hard to see any solution to this devastating problem.

DPI trials clearly show that African Lovegrass is so protein deficient that country infested with it is only capable of maintaining a wether at a rate of 1 dse/ha.

The future of Monaro's livestock breeding industry is in jeopardy and if we cannot turn this problem around, it will eventually disappear!

So too will all the Native Vegetation on Monaro!

All tiers of government and their agencies are turning their blind eye to the telescope, when they look at the problem, which is rarely. (Too Hard basket!)

Crown Land, Parks and Reserves, are another continuing source of more contamination and Government must become seriously involved in cleaning up their own backyard!

Local Councils have had their fingers burnt trying to legally enforce the Noxious Weeds Act and now their recommendations for control are totally ineffective. However, they do have considerable powers of enforcement and when recalcitrant farmers show little concern for the problem and their weeds are affecting their neighbour's land, then heavy financial penalties and a zero tolerance approach should still be recommended.

The same should apply to all forms of Crown Land!

If ensuring compliance requires extra Government financial support, then we should be requesting that the Government do so! At present, there is little compliance with the Noxious Weeds Act and it is an issue that we should address firmly.

Cooma itself has Lovegrass all around the town and every vehicle that comes out on to country roads is a potential source of further contamination, while every vehicle and machine that comes to service roads, telephone and power lines is a real threat to any farmers' weed status, in spite of the worthy efforts of those bodies to prevent them carrying these deadly menaces.

Farmers are required to prevent the spread of all weeds onto their properties, but the odds are heavily stacked against them and they are fighting, "with one hand tied behind their back".

The native grasses are simply not strong enough to prevent the march of this aggressive weed, which is extremely difficult to identify in its early stages and farmers are forbidden to try and establish a stronger stand of improved perennial pasture, mainly phalaris and clover, (which would also allow farmers to carry up to three times the number of stock), instead of the native grass stand, by the Native Vegetation Act.

Not until the weed has such a strong hold on the land that it becomes less than 50% native vegetation, can the farmer legally set about establishing an improved pasture, and by then it is often too late! The inevitable result is more country becoming like that north of Cooma.

Government authorities have expressed a desire to preserve the best examples of Monaro's Native Grassland and many farmers would also like to do so, but the act makes it almost impossible for the farmer to remain profitable enough to continue to fight this battle, or to have the freedom to select the appropriate parts of his farm for the native grasses to thrive without challenge.

The two critical issues the Government should focus on are assisting this battle with African Lovegrass and RESEARCH.

Genetic Modification of the African Lovegrass plant to make it both high protein and palatable should become an urgent and high priority!

If the Native Vegetation Act was repealed, about a third of Monaro would always remain covered in native vegetation, because of the natural topography of the area, and because farmers who value it for many reasons, would be able to help preserve these portions.

This story is repeated along the Far South Coast, as Fireweed and also African Lovegrass are proving almost unstoppable in that far easier terrain and this happens again and again in other districts with other or similar weeds.

History has shown us very clearly, how misguided government regulations,(eg farmers forced to clear saltbush off their properties out west), have proven most counter-productive and the farmers have had to battle to repair the damage those regulations have caused to their environment.

The Minister is currently reviewing the Native Vegetation Act and there is no doubt whatsoever that if the Act was repealed, the Government would save considerable funds, (which would be better spent on fighting African Lovegrass), the farmers would become far stronger in their battle with this scourge and the environment (native grasses and biodiversity) would have a far better chance of survival!

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In 1973 I was awarded a Nuffield Farming Scholarship to study farming, principally in the UK, but also in Europe and I added Canada to my study agenda, on the way home.

I was most fortunate to be selected and it was an enlightening and wonderful experience. Farming in the UK then, was exciting, stimulating and most productive. That tiny island was producing more tonnes of grain than we produced in Australia!

“British Beef” from the traditional British breeds was exceptionally good and British farmers were thriving and recognized as a powerful force in the economy.

Many of the contacts I made then endure to this day and the Nuffield “family” is a constant source of inspiration and ideas.

On top of a period spent “jackarooing” on New Zealand farms, and a lifetime of farming on Monaro, on both granite and basalt soils, as well as representing farmers in many fora, I feel I have been able to gain a broad view of Agriculture in the world.

I recently returned to the UK and revisited some of my friends there, but was distressed by a lot of what I saw:

Heavy regulation, driven by the EEC, (who’s focus is to support the very small and uneconomic farmers in much of Europe), and supported by a strong environmental

movement in both EEC and UK, has reduced production, demoralized farmers and reduced many to simply waiting for the next government handout.

This over-regulation is not helping the environment either and recent UK reports highlight the fact that nature is forced badly out of balance by these mis-guided interventions.

We have seen the same here, with devastating results like the 2003 bushfires, resulting from bad policies, more political than scientific, and that has mirrored similar distortions around the world, like the problems in USA's Yellowstone National Park.

On Monaro, problems caused by the Native Vegetation Act, reports from people who can remain anonymous, with "spy in the sky" monitoring, are destroying the trust between Government agencies and farmers, who care for 70% of the land and who have shown, through their Landcare groups that with good peer support and encouragement from CMA that they can tackle weed infestations with enthusiasm.

Towamba Valley Weed Project is another excellent example of farmers working together.

Recent moves to form a "Super" government agency, as the previous bodies jockey for their positions around a new table, with new priorities, are only a distraction from the work that the CMA's should be doing on the ground to help farmers fight the weed battle. Only a long, united and determined effort, with government encouragement, has any chance of success.

The delay will prove most costly in environmental terms and people who believe that efficient and profitable farm production should be sacrificed for environmental gains and that "Stewardship" payments will prove to be a panacea to farmers' economic problems, and a substitute for sound returns, are seriously misguided.

"Food Security" is an increasing priority and must remain a fundamental requirement for all our future goals, in our CAP and all our planning.

Monaro is wonderful livestock breeding country, sound and disease-free, with a climate that "sorts out the wheat from the chaff" in livestock terms, and with farmers who rely on their livestock for all their income, who therefore ensure that only the best are retained on farm.

The success of "Monaro Merinos" and "Monaro Angus" highlights that we have some of the best genetics in this country, which also means that they are some of the best in the world!

Highly productive farming and good conservation can work hand in hand together and they must do so, if the future is going to incorporate the best of these two goals.

Chemical farming and direct drilling, leaving good ground cover and conserving soil moisture, together with new crop and pasture varieties, have revolutionized farming on Monaro and given farmers far more flexibility, and provide the only hope of turning back the weed tide and maintaining profitable farms to carry out this vital task of winning the weed war.

I can remember when “Sale Day” was an important day for Cooma businesses and businessmen like Lindsay Hain made no bones about the importance of farming in supporting the local economy.

Food Security is a fundamentally important issue for the whole world. It can only raise the importance of farming. It may bring back some of the other benefits that farming can provide for the region.

I have a vision for the future, where “Food Tourism” is recognized as a fundamental part of the local economy and farmers are not “handcuffed” by counterproductive regulation and their strong conservation work is supported by government authorities.

We already produce outstanding beef and lamb (if we had a local abattoir to process it) and the nearby Far South Coast is renowned for its cheese and oysters and there are a number of other emerging food industries in the region. The “Bemboka Banquet” is just one example of how successfully this can be promoted for the region’s benefit.

None of this will happen if the Monaro succumbs to the African Lovegrass invasion, which appears likely at this stage.

Similarly, none of the native grasses or the biodiversity that we would like to preserve, will survive either. They certainly haven’t in the Cooma-ACT corridor!

Weed control is farmers’ responsibility and if we “unshackle” these farmers, who already spend infinitely more than the government funds we distribute, on weed control, not only are they likely to win the war, but they will also conserve a considerable portion of Monaro’s native grasses in the process.....and they will only have themselves to blame if they don’t win!

We need to concentrate far more on compliance with the Noxious Weeds Act and I encourage the Government to repeal the Native Vegetation Act.

“Education and encouragement, not Regulation!” is the only way to win this crucial battle and we desperately need the Government to be on our side and helping, rather than getting in the way.

YES, WE DO NEED TO CHANGE OUR APPROACH!

Howard Charles,

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[REDACTED]

10-8-12

(These are my personal views and do not necessarily reflect those of the [REDACTED] Board)

