


BOLIVIA 2372
NSW
19th August 2012

NATIVE VEGETATION ACT – REGULATION REVIEW

I am a cattle producer owning freehold 460 Ha of granite lands on the western fall of the New England Ranges. I have owned, lived on and managed this land since 1976. My wife and I worked hard and saved hard for 18 years to earn the money to buy it. We love this land.

In the past 3 years I have planted over 4,000 trees, and through good seasons, good management, hard work and lots of money have kept 90% of them alive as of today. I will continue planting trees so long as I remain on this land, as like most here I have some land, about 1/3rd, that is over cleared (in my opinion), and some that needs clearing.

At no stage have I ever taken out any trees from original growth areas, of which there are significant areas under my care still in pristine condition.

I am a good and competent manager of the land under my control and I have ambitions and the means to make it a lot better if allowed. The Act prevents me from carrying out these plans.

I am totally against this legislation and nothing I might subsequently say should give you any comfort that I want anything else but a repeal of the Act, and a rethink of the whole issue under the same guiding principles of stakeholder involvement and impact consideration as was done with the Western Rivers review of environmental urban and agricultural water usage, and various marine environment reviews.

One of the few positives left to farmers on freehold land prior to this Act was the general principle that we were free to conduct our business and manage the land as we see fit so long as we are doing no harm to others or neglecting management of harmful substances and feral pests. This Act cuts a swathe through this principle and is bitterly resented by myself and every other farmer I have spoken to. The unanimous vote of the 16th July 2012 meeting at Tenterfield Golf Club calling for the abolition of the Act gives me full confidence that my view is shared by all but a possible tiny number of my colleagues throughout NSW.

The changes to the Regulations suggested in your presentations and publications are an insult to all farmers and I reject the whole concept. It's not worth responding to as though it were a noteworthy document, which it isn't.

On a political level, the advice of the Upper House Member to the 16th July 2012 Tenterfield meeting that "this Act will not be repealed because that would never pass the house" is adding insult to injury and simply confirms that 99% of farmers in this state who own outright the land affected are to be ignored in order to curry favour with left/green ill informed urban voters of this state. The parties included in this rejection has to include the Liberal Party, as I don't believe the Guns and Moses people would gang up on a repeal of the Act. Nobody at that meeting will forget this betrayal.

I have cleared areas of eucalyptus regrowth in the past. These areas, comprising about 1/3rd of my arable lands, are now a mass of seedlings and suckers such that the land is not viable for any purpose, and certainly supports far fewer higher level birds and animals than it once did.

This situation has arisen as a result of Government legislation prior to the current Act that stipulated that 5 trees per acre must be left when any clearing is done. I unfortunately left all the big habitat trees evenly distributed over the land, and left a lot more than the stipulated 5 per acre. The result was a mass of seedlings and suckers that I could not afford to control as we were in rolling El Nino drought and barely surviving.

What I want to do now is create meadows of from 1 to 4 hectares throughout this mass of regrowth, and clear these meadows of all but the most significant habitat trees. Where there are open paddocks I am planting trees at the rate of over 1,000 per year to create wildlife corridors and shelter belts.

I would leave shelter belts of from 25 to 50 metres deep surrounding each meadow as a buttress against hot and cold winds and frosty air flows and at the same time providing a totally interconnected mosaic of contiguous diverse native vegetation.

This I believe would allow me to manage my land productively and at the same time optimise the environment favoured by existing and departed wildlife.

The Act prevents me from doing this. It DOES allow me to clear 100% of the post 1990 regrowth (subject to someone else's interpretation) and I could go around and bulldoze large numbers of genuine old growth habitat trees along my boundaries and other lineal assets. I have no intention of engaging in such vandalism, but would like to be able to clear vegetation in such a way that a sustainable, beautiful and productive environment is created.

If there are disciplined experts out there who disagree with my plans, or want me to optimise the use of my land for purposes other than my own benefit as I see it, they could visit and discuss. If the Government wants me to manage a native vegetation reserve no doubt we could come to a commercial arrangement agreeable to both parties, so long as the Government is not "negotiating" while holding a draconian sword to my neck as they are now doing.

I have a demonstrated track record of being a very good manager of existing special interest and original growth areas. Paying me to do this would be a good investment for the people of NSW if they want to encourage ongoing biodiversity.

The Act as it stands does not take into account the extreme range of conditions it blankets, and for this reason alone should be scrapped.

If I were to simply give up farming and allow the land to rest, it would within a very short period of time be covered boundary to boundary in eucalyptus regrowth. That is the nature of the light granite soils in this area. It is a perfect seed bed. Even lightly stocked with cattle, this process is currently underway throughout my property. I estimate it would take about 4 weeks of spraying and tordoning every year to keep on top of this natural process. I get around to this job as and when I can afford to. Currently the trees are gaining on me.

I know that lands to the west have their own issues, and that farmers out there are every bit as resentful of the dead hand of this Act as I am.

The tinkering with the Regulation as proposed will not allow me to manage my property in a responsible manner, so I have instead presented you with an outcome based counter proposal. If you change the Act in such a way that it will enable me to proceed with my own plans for [REDACTED] then you will have my support. If not, I will never give up opposing this insulting and draconian Act of Panic, which I know is 90% pure politics and possibly 10% response to a genuine but ill considered reaction to the Wentworth Group Report on Native Vegetation Clearing.

I did read your "New approach to native vegetation management". It was a struggle.

The second paragraph of your "Fact sheet 1" and following comments claiming that "agriculture is dependent on healthy native vegetation" and such gratuitous throw away lines as "the NSW Government supports landowners" and "the natural resources upon which sustainable agriculture is based.." is disgusting. While armed with the heavy stick of this NV Act the NSW Government has done next to nothing before or since to research the facts or effectively promote the environmental partnership concept through education and persuasion. Why bother when you have such effective surveillance methods, dedicated sheriffs and horrendous penalties to enforce your edicts? Farmers like myself have been left to work it out for ourselves. Your extension activities have been shamefully inadequate. It was all stick, no carrot. Who do you think you are fooling?

You have laid down with your sword with this Act. You should not be surprised that the overwhelming majority of farmers are adamant that they want the Government to bury this dead cat rather than going along with some perfumed and beribboned version of it.

Remember that in 2011 when your review of the Regulations (not the Act) there was a labour government in power and farmers knew that they would be lucky to get any concessions at all, so we did talk to their representatives in the hope of getting at least some relief. You may be relying on this when saying "The community made it clear they wanted less red tape...blah blah" A bit like saying "100 lashes or 24 hours on the rack?" or perhaps "a little more water with the stale bread?".

Now that a supposedly conservative Government is in power we expect a lot better than that, and will continue to demand it of our representatives.

Yours sincerely

Ian Thompson