

Gary Humble

**Submission on proposed changes to
Native Vegetation Regulations**

Our native environment is vital to us and to all life on the planet.

Our government's duty is to protect it for all, not to allow minority interests to destroy it for their own short-term profit. I am disappointed that the New South Wales Government is proposing major changes to native vegetation laws that will allow for an increase in land clearing in large parts of the state.

The results of mistakes of earlier generations, with decades of land being cleared unsustainably, the bulldozing and burning of millions of hectares of endangered ecological communities, the destruction of habitats of threatened species and wetlands have demonstrated the need to learn our lesson.

Strong native vegetation laws need to be promoted and enforced so that we don't return to the bad practices of the past. The *Native Vegetation Act 2003* has played a critical role in stabilising the extent of native vegetation in New South Wales. The integrity of the legislative scheme is underpinned by the application of detailed regulations and a robust methodology for the assessment of environmental outcomes.

Protection of native vegetation in the landscape provides essential environmental, social and economic benefits, including protecting water quality, maintaining soil health and providing wildlife habitat. A pattern of remnant vegetation dotted across heavily cleared landscapes protects the threatened mammals, birds, reptiles and plants that are dependent on this important asset. We can't afford to lose any more critical areas of bushland across the country.

The currently proposed changes in the draft *Native Vegetation*

Regulation 2012 will place very large areas of native vegetation at risk from unrestrained and unsustainable clearing. The integrity of these important environment protections will be severely weakened and will inevitably lead to further ongoing destruction and fragmentation of habitats.

In particular, the proposals to weaken existing protections by allowing clearing of native species and thinning of native vegetation without advice and approval from Catchment Management Authorities has the potential to result in the loss of hundreds of thousands of hectares of native vegetation and damage the quality and viability of water supplies.

Wholesale clearance of vast areas under broad-acre farming practices opens up the opportunity for the massive problems inherent in monocultures. Healthy, biodiverse landscapes result in more productive agricultural systems. With the onset of climate change and its associated increase in extreme weather events and temperature fluctuations, conserving native vegetation will benefit biodiversity, farmers and the Australian economy into the future.

Allowing 'burning off' to occur as a routine agricultural management activity has the potential to negatively impact on our flora, fauna and endangered ecological communities as well as threaten life and property and add to CO₂ emissions.

I urge you to support a balanced approach to this reform process, and to reject proposals from vested interests in the farming and resources sector that will reduce the environmental protections contained in the regulations and significantly weaken the intent of the *Native Vegetation Act 2003*.