

Native Vegetation Regulation Review
Conservation Policy and Strategy Section
Office of Environment and Heritage
Level 12, PO Box A290 □ Sydney South, NSW 1232

24 August 2012

Dear Sir/Madam,

I write to voice my concerns about the regulation review to the Native Vegetation Act. It is disturbing to me that this is being conducted at a time when massive land clearing is already taking place because of mining.

Previous broad scale land clearing resulted in major salinity problems which have not been resolved. Up until the early 1980's farmers were rewarded for clearing land with no regard for the environmental consequences. Today land clearing is recognised as the greatest threat to native vegetation and wildlife in NSW. We also know that it has serious repercussions on the quality of our water.

Until recently NSW had one of the worst records for land clearing in the world. As a result the 2003 and 2005 Native Vegetation laws were introduced to end large scale land clearing in the state.

- This Act was critical in stabilising native vegetation in New South Wales.
- This legislation is supported by strong detailed regulations and a strict regime and methodology for the assessment of environmental outcomes.
- The scientifically developed rules that are currently in place should not be changed as they are safeguards to control applications to clear.

The draft Native Vegetation Regulation 2012 will place very large areas of native vegetation at risk from unrestrained and unsustainable clearing. This is particularly so where the proposed legislation allows the clearing of invasive native species and thinning of native vegetation without advice and approval from Catchment Management Authorities. Huge acreages of native vegetation were cleared in similar situations previously, and will occur again if this legislation as it stands is successful.

Another strategy used in bygone days was the routine agricultural practice of management of land by fire. This also looks to be revived in the draft legislation. Apart from the huge loss this will inflict on our wildlife and biodiversity, there are real dangers in this to human life and property. We do not need to go down this path.

Productive agriculture depends upon a diverse and healthy ecosystem, a landscape rich in native vegetation. Today most farmers appreciate these environmental values and have seen their productivity increase where native vegetation has been retained. For example,

- on farm water losses have decreased

- pockets of native vegetation have provided habitat for the natural predators of farm pests.
- Property values of farms have also been higher where biodiversity has been maintained.

Peter Andrews of Bylong is a shining example of what can be done. The success of Landcare in Australia is testament to the value farmers put on biodiversity.

Cutting bureaucracy should not be at the expense of our environment. Should we proceed with the draft legislation we will learn this to our cost in the way of poorer agricultural performance and reduction of water quality.

We need to keep uppermost the benefits that a healthy and balanced environment brings us. The protection of water quality, soil health and the provision for wildlife habitat are essential for our wellbeing and provide social and economic benefits beyond the farm. We do not need to return to the practices of pre-2003 and the environmental damage that occurred as an end result.

Please do not water down the provisions of the Native Vegetation Act 2003.

Yours sincerely

Ms Diane O'Mara

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