

Submission 10 – Name withheld

To whom it may concern,

I hear Neil Byron talking on ABC radio today and this prompted me to write a submission.

Background:

I am currently finishing my Master degree in Urban and Environmental Planning at Griffith University and currently work as a research assistant for the Australian Centre of Ecological Analysis and Synthesis (www.aceas.org.au) a part of the Terrestrial Ecosystems Research Network (www.tern.org.au). I have grown up in Northern NSW, north of Lismore and don't consider myself a 'greenie' but one who understands the balance of social, economic and environmental sustainability.

Issue:

I am concerned with proposed changes to land clearing laws in terms on the impacts that they may have on the sustainability of local communities. I will provide an example of this.

Case Study:

I have grown up (my parents still) near Dunoon, which is dominated by the macadamia industry which provides significant economic benefits and job opportunities to locals, including some good friends of mine. Last year (2013) there was an incident where a long stand of Tallowood (*Eucalyptus microcorys*), which extended for approximately 1-2km as a windbreak along Duncan road, was logged. From mine and many other locals point of view, one day it was there, the next it was gone. This stand of trees provided significant amenity for the local area, it is a significant part of the landscape driving, cycling or walking along the roads with these wonderful stands of trees. Working in an ecological science organisation I understand that they also provide significant corridors for Koalas to move around the heavily fragmented landscape which has been largely cleared since European settlement. They also provide many other general benefits that vegetation provides.

The Macadamia farm responsible for these actions is Hancock Farms, owned and operated by Hancock Agricultural Investment Group (http://haig.jhancock.com/about_advantages.htm). There has been a lot of misinformation within the community as to why they performed this land clearing and I am not 100% sure which reason is the primary one. This is what I have heard:

1. Ex-tropical cyclone Oswald damaged the trees and they needed to be removed because of risks associated to falling on the road.
2. They were shading a row of Macadamia trees which reduce their productivity.
3. A local sugar cane mill was short of product to use in their power generator so they basically paid for the vegetation to burn and produce power.

It could be a combination of these reasons as to why the trees were cleared but after talking to a worker on the farm, he informed me that the primary reason was to make profit by selling the timber to the sugar mill. These other reasons may be used by the business but there is strong indications that these were not the main reasons. The main issue is that as far as I am aware, and many others, there was no community consultation in regards to this activity,

even though it was on private land, it has a large impact on the local area, not just neighbours, who I am sure were consulted, and also on wildlife.

The other issue is that this company is a massive company owned by an American investment corporation (Manulife Financial Corporation in 2004). They appear to have no regard for the local community in the sense of proper consultation which translates into weakened local economic, social and environmental values. Most locals I have talked to all agree that the only benefits from these activities were the shareholders of this large American/Canadian corporation, from the sale of the timber, rather than any local beneficiaries. Locals in fact have lost out because they have lost an iconic environmental value from the area. If actions like this are continued to be done on all of Hancock's farms, which basically make up the majority of Macadamia farms, then there will be widespread degradation of the area.

In summary what I am basically pointing out is that changing these laws may benefit individual, smaller scale farmers who do not have such an impact on local communities. But large operations such as the Macadamia industry in Northern NSW, which are owned by foreign corporations, and have investors who are based on the other side of the world, do not have a strong regard for local community values. These laws could allow for these kinds of practices to increase which would be highly damaging to the region by strongly impacting on amenity and possibly causing localised declines, even extinctions of koalas, who need these Tallwood corridors to move around the landscape and escape from a range of threats.

Please contact me on [REDACTED] if you wish to discuss this further, I am nearly graduated from my Degree and I am also looking for work experience and am also keen to do community consultative work in these kinds of matters. I am very passionate about trying to achieve what's best for the community and intend on getting into planning and consultative work.