

SUBMISSION TO THE
INDEPENDENT BIODIVERSITY REVIEW PANEL

Made by

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The text of my submission, the attached photographs, and my
name are available for publication

BUT APPENDIX “A” WHICH DETAILS MY FINANCIAL
POSITION IS NOT FOR PUBLICATION.

Written at [REDACTED] on 3 September 2014

To the members of the review panel.

I am addressing Theme 2, Conservation Action, and in particular the first indicated point of interest to the panel:

1. Is the current system effective in encouraging landowners to generate public benefits from their land and rewarding them as environmental stewards?

Or are current mechanisms too focused on requiring private landowners to protect ecosystem services and biodiversity at their own cost?

I am a farmer, or more accurately a grazier as I do very little cultivation for reasons that I will explain.

In 1985 I purchased an additional 488 hectares of land about two kilometres from my then property.

This additional land was the proverbial “abandoned farm” that the real estate agents love to promote.

It was one paddock following a fire in about 1960 which had burnt all the fences.

This same fire had germinated gum tree seeds across about half of

what had previously been a useful piece of sheep country.

The then owner had failed to do anything about the regrowth. One of the neighbours who had been farming alongside my new purchase at the time of the fire once said to me “after the fire and when all the regrowth sprang up, we thought that we could not afford to get men in with mattocks to chip out the seedlings, but now 25 years later we know that we could not afford not to”.

So when I bought the block, about half the area was covered with dense 25 year old regrowth but because the trees were very closely spaced, often less than a metre apart, they had failed to grow to any appreciable size, growth being restrained by the availability of water.

At this stage of growth, removal of the regrowth by a bladed tractor looked to be a straight forward action and this was reflected in the price that I paid for the block.

I had to borrow heavily to make the purchase and for the next ten years my every effort was directed towards meeting the loan repayments.

By the time I had made the last payment, SEPP 46 had been introduced and that has since morphed into the Native Vegetation Act 2003 and what was regrowth when I purchased the block is now declared to be Remnant Forest and fully protected.

I consider this to be a great injustice.

What has been done in forcing farmers to suffer great financial loss for the benefit of biodiversity (and the general public if one believes the view that was current at the time that the ban on farm development was all about complying with the Kyoto agreement) can only be compared to the injustice that might be done to city families were the State Government to decide to deal with Homelessness by requiring every house owner in Sydney to make one room in their house available, free of charge, to a homeless person.

For many this would not be an intrusion, there are not that many homeless persons, but for a family with five or six children, living in a house which some homeless person selected, it could well mean all the children having to sleep in one room so that a homeless person could have a room to themselves.

Or in the case of an investment property, the existence of a homeless person “in residence” could well make the rest of the property worthless.

I have proposed this scenario to various city people and they all say that it could not happen.

We once thought that about farming too, that no Government could ever close down farming but it has happened and totally without compensation.

You may well reply that the Acts do not close down farming, they

only ban clearing of land.

That might be more accurate if the ban applied only to the clearing of Climax Forest but the decision to redefine the meaning of words as used in the Native Vegetation Act 2003 and to declare that regrowth is only that plant matter which germinated after 1990 has effectively closed down farming on those properties which had regrowth awaiting clearing on the last day of 1989.

For those farmers whose properties are fully developed, the ban on clearing has had no affect but for those whose properties are still in a development stage this is a disastrous change and is causing a division between farmers and the rest of the community.

I am not one of those who believes that because land is Freehold that the community can have no say in the use of that land.

The intrinsic value of Freehold is simply an amalgamation of all the rights that the community gives with the Freehold title.

But I am saying that Australia has abandoned all right to call itself a just society if the farming community is forced to carry, at their own expense, the cost of meeting the communities goals with regard to biodiversity and land management.

I am attaching three photographs. The first two show the state of regrowth on my property. These tree germinated after the fire in about 1960 and cannot grow because they are too close together. The third photograph shows what has happen following another fire

that entered the property in December 2009. About half of the then regrowth has been killed, the rest is shooting from the base.

An entirely new generation of gum trees is now springing up in the clearings between survivors and while these are unprotected regrowth, the close proximity of the protected survivors means that there is no room for a bladed tractor to work to remove the new crop and the ultimate density will be greater than before.

It is not just a matter of allowing trees to grow on the property.

The land has effectively been taken from use entirely and all that I am left with is the obligation to pay Council Rates, LLS rates and to control rabbits and Serrated Tussock and African Lovegrass.



