

Dear Sirs & Madam,

I would firstly like to point out that in my area (Walcha Council) using anecdotal and historical records, including photographs, it would appear that the largest impact on native biodiversity occurred in the 1890s. This was mainly due to legislation at the time requiring selected land to be cleared, and so by the 1930s the aerial photos I have show a landscape devoid of the original native habitat and that it had largely become a sea of fallen timber beginning to be over-run with rabbits and blackberry bushes. This was quite possibly the normal situation right across the New England region just as it was on the area I now farm. Unfortunately then for the original biodiversity most of the vegetation had been reduced to a few remaining untouched pockets and the rest of the landscape is now largely a single ageing monoculture specific to various locations on the farm i.e. all black ash trees or all stringy bark with no understory. Into this situation legislation was enforced with outrageously draconian penalties trying to protect exactly what?

I have suggested in the past to the local Catchment Management Authority, that Land care or the like, plant trees or understory into areas of existing bushland on farms and make it the best it could be with a holistic overview of the region, rather than starting out with a bare paddock, these areas would need to be properly managed. Landowners would need incentives and help managing the enormous problem of feral animals and noxious weeds, which are an ever present threat to income and native biodiversity, surely this would be more beneficial. I have noticed in recent times an explosion in both feral pests and noxious weeds in my local area and for example farms that have become "locked up" because of the current laws have resulted in a haven for feral pigs that on my farm alone have destroyed over 60 hectares of vegetation. I would question whether under the existing legislation have the desired outcomes been achieved?

Landowners should be exclusively consulted as to the outcomes that both they and the government are trying to achieve and common ground sought as we are farming to make an income to support our families and also in my case a love of what I do. It also seems that people not directly affected by the existing laws have an undue amount of influence. Helping to educate the community on methods of providing a more favourable habitat for biodiversity and what currently exists would also be a good start, as up until now there has not been a "work with farmers" attitude. This should also extend to fire management as those laws seem to be headed down the same vicious panicky over regulation path.

I would invite the panel to tour my farm some 3000 hectares to further discuss the problems and outcomes of the legislation as it currently exists, and improvements to everyone's benefit that could be achieved.

Yours Sincerely

James Kermode