

Independent Biodiversity Legislation Review

2014

To whom it may concern,

I welcome this opportunity to comment on the Biodiversity Legislation Review.

Firstly a little background. I am in the Dubbo area and our family have been on the same rural property since 1840. We have some written and anecdotal history which relates to the changes in landscape influenced by ourselves and/or Government legislation.

John Oxley and Allan Cunningham travelled through here in 1817 and it is relevant to note their descriptions of the country - "The country was broken in irregular low hills thinly studded with small timber, and covered with grass: the whole landscape within the compass of our view was clear and open, resembling diversified pleasure grounds irregularly laid out and planted. The animation of the whole scenery was greatly increased by the smoke of the natives' fires arising in every quarter, distinctly marking that we were in a country which afforded them ample means of subsistence; far different from the low deserts and morasses to the south-west.

The same fine grazing tract of country continued over irregular hills and valleys for about four miles, when ascending a high hill (named Mount Johnston), a little upon our left, we had a very extensive view to the north-east and east."



Photo A

Please note that Photo A is a recent photo (2014) of the landscape that Oxley referred to on his route to Mt Johnstone. I am willing to prove the accuracy of this claim by any visitation to this site.

Since white man has been here we have endeavoured to compete with nature rather than complement it or work with it. Government allowed the opening up of land as long as settlers killed the trees and ploughed the soil. We fought fires, overgrazed, degraded soil nutrients and destroyed biodiversity and we have continued to do this into my time not only with the encouragement of, but insistence of Government. When it appears that past actions have been wrong we are then legislated with other controls which, I believe, are continuing to further degrade our environment.

There are currently many initiatives which have developed from the ground up rather than from Government down to the land-manager but it takes time for the science to catch-up and prove that it works. Eg.

1. Holistic Management and Cell Grazing started over 25 years ago and now derivations of this is accepted as being the best way to manage livestock with modifications like Prograze and Evergraze. The main thing is there is a recognition that our soils need time to recover after a grazing event and this is now supported by academic research.
2. Pasture cropping has shown that there is not the need for excessive overworking of our soils or overuse of chemicals to grow a cereal crop.
3. Direct drill of large scale cropping and the retaining of stubble and ground cover.
4. Water ponding, Peter Andrews , Regrarians, Yeomans and many others.
5. Currently there is a move to look at good soils, good water and good plants feeding good livestock to provide healthy food to humans and getting away from processed and manufactured foods.

This is all coming from innovators who are changing the way we are managing the land and is slowly being proved by scientific research and then taken up by Government. Initially it is not coming from Government as Government is directed mainly by the next election which is directed by human emotion. The best knowledge, the best innovators are those who work directly with the land rather than those who are sitting in an office somewhere who, all they can do is, complain about what land-managers do. I believe that much legislation has been of greater detriment to the land rather than a benefit.

Of course, I do accept that some land-managers have done and will continue to degrade our land but rather than constricting all land-managers to control the few, we need to encourage the good rather than just penalise the bad.

I admit, my thoughts are very insular as they reflect my concerns on land that I am managing but I assume that many others have the same problems. We have areas where there is a need for planting of trees and vegetation but our greatest concern is the infiltration of Native Invasive Scrub (NIS) and in particular Black and White Cypress Pine, on over 2000 acres. We have country which was running 4,000 lambing ewes in the 1940's which now we don't stock at all due to invasive scrub and the only active erosion we have is caused by a monoculture of trees, see Photo A.

For many years we have been working with the local CMA, Landcare and others to find a remedy for this problem but with little success. We have secured a Property Vegetation Plan on about 150 acres to allow us to thin the affected areas but the restrictions imposed do not allow us to bring this land back to how it was initially.

This land is currently a monoculture of Cypress Pine with little to no grasses and very little bird life or other fauna. The soils are eroding so carbon is being lost from the soil and what carbon is in the pines is “locked-up”. There is little tree growth and therefore no mineral, carbon and water cycle. This was once a Grassy Box Woodland as shown below and we should help nature return it to this.



My aim has been to return this land to a Grassy Box Woodland but there is no provision within any legislation to allow us to or to gain any financial benefit from doing so. I believe that the INS should be able to be harvested in a systematic method to allow a financial return into the future.

My approach would be:-

1. Thin the INS to initial spacing of approx. 6-10 meters, leaving well structured pines and any remnant eucalypts.
2. Thinnings to be returned to the soil and/or converted to biochar and other forms of energy.
3. Thinning the trees will allow grasses to return and also allow the remaining trees to grow.

4. As the trees grow they will at some stage reach a millable size, ie over 25cm DBHOB and a further thinning would be done to encourage faster growth in the remaining trees and remnant eucalypts.

5. Perhaps 40 to 50 years later the trees now 45cm DBHOB can be harvested and milled and the landscape has returned to a biodiversity of different grasses, trees, shrubs and fauna. I propose the thinning of the trees, turning into biochar/carbon/energy, to allow the remainder to grow into a harvestable size and then having the right to mill. The land would then have 100% ground-cover and be reinstated to a Grassy Box Woodland. **There is no current legislation which would allow this.**

A Property Vegetation Plan (PVP) ensures that only trees under 25 cm are taken (unmillable) and that at least 20 trees per hectare are retained.

A Forestry PVP ensures that the area remains as a Pine Forest, not a Grassy Box Woodland.

Proposed self-assessment is very similar to a PVP.

This approach is from the ground up but there needs to be a change in Departmental thinking to allow a positive outcome.

I believe that the changes need to be:-

- 1 A change to the "one size fits all" approach and assess each project on its merits.
- 2 Revise the provision that at least 20% of the INS, by area, has to be retained. To be able to treat only 80% of the landscape can in some circumstances, eg Photo A, be more detrimental than beneficial. In this situation I believe that if it is good to treat part of the problem then it is good to treat all of it.
- 3 Provision should be made for ecologically sound projects to be approved and to allow the "right" to harvest into the future.

Scott Tourle

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