

BIODIVERSITY LEGISLATION REVIEW SUBMISSION

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As a 4th generation farmer that believes in a future for my children, I feel that I have an obligation to express my views to this panel.

With the recent murder of my cousin Glen Turner, there has been much debate and media about the rights of farmers, and the role they have as custodians of the land. I believe that this has been politicised so such an extent that it may now influence this Review. A debate that, from my perspective, should only reflect decisions made on evidence-based science.

There is no business or private citizen in Australia that is not constrained by regulation. Landholders have to work within the requirements of legislation, whether they want to or not. Compliance officers are in the field to help landholders develop sustainable practices. My father left school when he was 12 years old to work as a timber getter, as well as working on the family farm. In those days, there was little regulation, and wholesale clearing was the norm. Things have now changed; my children now talk of climate change and how we can plant more trees on the farm to sustain and improve biodiversity, and offset greenhouse gases.

It is difficult to comprehend how, given current knowledge of the fragility of our environment, some farmers are still motivated by short term profit with no regard for immediate and future consequences.

I have never had an environmental officer turn up on the farm to see if it is compliant with even the basics of reasonable land care. This should not be. It has been left to the individual landholder to farm in any way they see fit. In my experience, that has not led to good results. I can walk out onto my veranda and look towards other properties; and I see eroded river banks that have been cleared, burned and grazed. The adverse consequence of riparian strip clearance is clearly evident. Paddocks have been cleared of remnant vegetation, and obviously without permits.

These 'old' practices continue, and you only have to see the plumes of smoke at certain times of the year to realise how much vegetation and habitat is being lost. Most of this is done under the notion that it is untidy and unproductive land. That it might also be vital habitat does not cross these landholders' minds. At present there is no obligation on a landholder to have any qualification regarding animal husbandry or land care.

To bring attention to poor stewardship, you have to 'dob' in your neighbour. As you can understand, this is a difficult position to be placed in. We need more people in the field who can help protect the environment and steer landholders in the right directions.

(signed) Will Cutler

(an original hard copy of this submission will be sent to you by way of confirmation of this email)

