

I have been involved in both farming and forestry for 58 years on the NS W Far North Coast and have found the native Vegetation Act one of the most difficult to work under.

- I am a land owner, I object to being called a land holder as I paid good money to own my property not just hold it and am still paying through blood, sweat and tears. We are always on the defensive, trying to guard our farms and our fee simple rights.
- It appears that the government is more concerned about how they are perceived in their dealings with the environment and bio diversity than they are about the economics and viability of farmers. Environmental outcomes should not be the first outcome considered, the viability of the land owner should be. We are the owners of the land and we are to be trusted to look after it.
- I believe that the definition of clearing is still too onerous on land owners, making it difficult to clear any new land. While National parks, forestry, mining and urban expansion have their own codes, with little accountability for what they can clear, how they can clear it and where they can clear it. The farmers are then made accountable to supply the offsets for these activities and provide species habitats
- The clearing of boundaries, internal fences and roads should all be to the “minimal extent”
- The only reason that there is so much native vegetation on my place is because I took the initiative years ago to see the value and potential of it. I looked after my trees at my own cost and with no help from anyone else. I never asked for financial help and never wanted it. But now, when it is time for me to harvest my asset, and do sustainable logging. – There are so many restrictions placed on me. It is only there because of me, not because of anyone else or even any covenant placed over my land. It seems to be forgotten that trees are a renewable resource and that they can be harvested sustainably.
- Under our LEP, there is a restriction on felling trees 40 metres either side of a stream or gully, which is difficult to do in our area as we have numerous gully and streams, running a couple of hundred meters apart
- The reason there are so many koalas and many threatened or endangered species still around is because of the retention of habitat that the farmers maintained voluntarily on their properties. Landowners will not volunteer information on whether they have or haven't got koalas or any threatened species, for fear of being penalised for actually maintaining a healthy environment for them.
- Information gathered by organisations, groups and individuals who trespass onto your property illegally should be disallowed in the court of law. Many photos have been taken and used out of context, eg ; logging operations look bad while it is happening, but give it a couple of months and you wouldn't even know there had been any logging done there. These people should be fined for trespass and for any false or misleading information given. They should be made pay for the court fees and time and hardship on the landowner.

- There is a lack of service support for land owners. Most people are unaware that the new RAMA's are out. Or that the Act is up for review. When the native veg act was first gazetted, there were meetings every second week almost, telling us what we couldn't do and how much we would be fined or how much gaol time we would spend if we broke their laws. But since the expansion of the RAMA's we have heard nothing. And like most government initiated documents they are not meant to be read or understood by the people they affect (like this inquiry paper) The CMA's are now charging a fee for copies of information.
- There is way too much over regulations, red tape and doubling up of laws, with the council trying to control what is happening on the land as well as state and federal agencies. The LEP's have devalued our land by changing the zoning from RU1 to RU2 and now the councils want to put a blanket green overlay on most of the farm land out our way. While the state government is still trying to push the native vegetation act on us, even when they promised before the election to abolish it.
- Die back is now a major issue in our area, government over regulations of burning off has caused the destruction of many of the iron barks in our area.
- There is also no accurate native vegetation data of Northern rivers trees and plants. Nor any definitive date or definition of old growth forest.
- I need the flexibility to change my weed management operations – ploughing, slashing, burning, spraying – each of these would depend on my finances, how much time I have and the weather.
- I also need the flexibility to vary my income stream off my land. I should be allowed to change what I farm when I find something more viable, without going to numerous government departments who all think they have the right to tell me what I can do on my place.
- Over the years, there has been way to much pressure put on the land owners and farmers. We are put under a microscope by every government department, by the environmentalist, by animal activists, etc, and contrary to popular belief, these people harass and bully us mercilessly. Farmer confidence is at an all time low, the drought, low cattle prices, low income all add up to disaster. Suicide rates are sky rocketing and still we are treated like second class citizens. There is very little public exposure of this issue. Mostly we are told that if you are not coping, seek medical help. Yeah right!!!!!!

Yours sincerely

Jim O'Neill

