

Submission to the Biodiversity Legislation Review

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Submission Introduction

In May 2014 I forwarded a submission to the Native Vegetation and Landscape Conservation Unit concerning the Draft Biodiversity Off-set Policy and the Draft Self-Assessment Native Vegetation Codes. This submission is in the form of an addendum to the above.

Firstly, to reinforce the case for recognition of the absolute importance of establishing a sound working relationship between broad acre rural landowners and Government agencies based on mutual respect, trust and pro-active cooperation.

Secondly, to propose a possible format for alternative arrangements that can avoid the undesirable consequences arising from the top down regulatory approach represented by the Native Vegetation Act and its fore runner SEPP46.

The Bush Culture

It has been estimated over 90% of our agricultural land is held by family farming enterprises and most have a history extending over several generations. At any one time the outlook of the incumbent is invariably long term; looking back in appreciation of the efforts of those who have gone before, and forward in anticipation of handing on to the next generation a farm in better shape than when they began. 'Better Shape' includes environmental as well as financial sustainability because the two are inseparable for medium to long term success.

These people are often branded by the unknowing as ultra conservative but the unknowing need reminding that the terms conservative and conservation are two sides of the same coin. In any case it is but half the story because success in farming and grazing enterprises depends absolutely on a progressive attitude to new ideas, new technology and innovation if the eternal enemy of declining terms of trade is to be overcome and the environment preserved.

A farmer spends his or her entire working life out there in the natural environment. And everything they do every day relates directly to the management decisions only they can make and for which they assume responsibility. Each farming or grazing enterprise is unique and management goal posts are always in motion. The forces of nature are volatile and largely unpredictable. Mother Nature abhors regulation and chaos theory prevails. A farmer can make the right decision today only to see it compromised tomorrow, next week or next month. Mistakes are inevitable. Getting it mostly right most of the time however will keep you on side with Mother Nature.

So What is the Alternative

This year we celebrate 25 years of landcare. It has been an outstanding success with many small groups of people acting locally to make real contributions to environmental care. National Landcare facilitator, Brett de Hayr, said in a recent interview that “Landcare’s evolution into a ‘movement’ rather than something more formally structured is its greatest strength. Nobody controls it it is a totally grassroots movement”. It has developed, he says, a complex structure akin to a donut, “most of its strength is in the periphery”.

It is wisdom of this calibre that must be brought to bear in solving problems created by the top down authoritarian mindset of past governments . Regulations SEPP46 followed by the Native Vegetation Act are examples of these failed policies that have driven a large wedge of distrust and disengagement between the public and private sectors in agriculture. The present government must accept that continuing progress in National Resource Management depends upon building a spirit of mutual respect and proactive cooperation in its place and across the broad spectrum of agricultural and pastoral industries.

It is therefore high time the Government grasped the de-regulation nettle, repealed the N.V.A. and other restrictive measures inhibiting progress and allow the spirit of Landcare to prevail.

Local Land Services is the obvious catalyst for change required to bring together all interested parties in communication, consultation and debate of many issues. The shape of the table, around which they gather, is irrelevant providing always, like the landcare donut, there is a hole in the middle. This is the way things work best in the bush. Top down authoritarianism fails.

James Litchfield



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