

## **SUBMISSION BIODIVERSITY REVIEW**

I own a property in the Purllewaugh district, east of Coonabarabran which has been in the family for over a hundred years. We operate a mixed farming enterprise consisting of cropping/pasture rotation sheep wool prime lambs and beef cattle.

I have observed and been involved in the land management debate since 1995, and prior to that, developed significant areas of land which previously was only considered grazing country due to its shallow nature and slope.

The development process has included a program of removal of large multi stemmed green timber, significant areas of thick regrowth cypress pine, thousands of hours of stick picking, rock raking, gully filling, contour banking, water reticulation, fencing on the contour, correction of soil deficiencies by fertilizer topdressing and development of crop/pasture rotations.

After 40 years of such development it is obvious to me and my neighbours that my enterprise is very sustainable, and along the way I have conserved a balance of biological diversity. There is a range of native animals and birdlife ever present on the property, and my crop/pasture rotation always leads to a return of native grasses.

That brief history leads me to state that if the current legislation under review had been in place 20 years earlier, it would have destroyed any chance of me developing a sustainable and productive enterprise. The area of land itself when I started development was weed infested, and suffering from gully erosion. It was fast developing into nothing more than feral and pest animal harbor. A liability to the local community and business sector.

The context section of the Issues Paper states that “biodiversity is vital in supporting human life on earth”. That may be so but so are farmers! It is a balance between the two that must be pursued. Already about 9% of land in NSW is national park or other public land, and OEH has conveniently dismissed the management of such lands from this “Issues Paper”.

The paper then lists a number of mechanisms, which from a practical point of view have failed to address biodiversity decline.

The Threatened Species listings are only a mechanism to prevent further land development. In my experience the retention of clumps or corridors of timber coupled with efficient crop/pasture development leads to a sustainable balance. Unfortunately SEPP46 and PVP's have not driven a practical form of strategic land use.

The imposition of covenants, particularly through the conversion process from perpetual lease to freehold, has been in many cases badly handled and open to punitive treatment of

landholders from agency staff. I know of a local case where the landowner has been told a covenant has been applied, but no map of the area has been provided and what are the conditions? There is no financial compensation, only penalty for what?

Strategic land use planning has possibilities which I will discuss further. Education and persuasion has been a disaster, as illustrated by the compliance disaster at Croppa Creek.

Market based mechanisms such as CMA financially supported systems for fencing off creeks etc. have been a wrought. On the whole this particular practice has led to bad feelings amongst neighbours, with some farmers getting handouts to re fence major portions of their properties.

Biodiversity offsets generally lead to development of a fire hazard, pest animal harbor on some ones boundary. Biobanking will produce the same result. These areas are a liability to the surrounding district, and deliver an adverse outcome.

If they were to be of any long term benefit there would have to be management rules for cool burning, weed control and pest management.

The funding would need to measure up to the productive capacity of the land if it had been developed, and of course the payments would have to be in perpetuity, otherwise biobanking would lead to a major drop in overall property value.

Land bought up as a mining offset becomes a similar liability. It's bad enough having mines developing. It's a double whammy when areas of land are bought as offset and left in an unmanaged state.

I have read through the 3 self-assessable codes, and having been involved in the debate for the last long 19 years I consider they are worse than what we have had at other periods during that time. They are simply not practicable, and are not up to speed with modern farming methods and cost of production.

Before answering Themes 1 to 5 I make the following statements and observations. I admit they are blunt, but whoever reads this submission needs to realize that biodiversity conservation on private land can only be maintained within the following boundaries.

Farms have to be productive and profitable units. They are not national parks. Agriculture is continually evolving, it does not stand still. Conservation will get left behind if it cannot achieve a positive outcome in such a situation. The Panel needs to formulate ways to cooperate with landowners to develop a positive triple bottom line outcome moving forward in a strategic land planning system.

Clumps and corridors of timber, either natural or planted, can deliver a positive environmental outcome when combined with the productive acres of crop and pasture.

Due to the ever increasing cost of production, modern farming techniques dictate that in many cases scattered trees are not acceptable nor can pest animals such as wild dogs and eagles be tolerated on private land.

Threatened Species legislation is dictating the “lock up” of many thousands of acres of potentially productive private land. A representation of such timber and species can be preserved in farmer controlled clumps or corridors. This will overcome the immoral situation at present, where farmers are bearing the total cost of so called “Threatened Species Conservation” legislation. The overbearing compliance and frustration of current legislation led to the Croppa Creek disaster.

This is not an isolated case. Many suicides, broken marriages, dislocated families, mental breakdowns and health disorders can be directly attributed to current environmental legislation, the conduct of compliance officers and the indifference of agency bureaucrats. The death of a forestry worker on the north coast, who was killed by a falling tree while having to deal with an environmental group harassing and trying to stop a legal logging operation hardly got a mention.

I have observed over many years how different species adapt to changes in farm practices and productivity. I remember the huge flocks of galahs and white cockatoos that used to turn up in the autumn when our district used to grow considerable acreages of sunflower. We eventually gave up growing the crop due to bird damage. A more recent change I have seen is the flocks of crows that turn up in the late autumn and early winter and follow the sowing machines around a paddock. Previously I would have said we don't see crows until lambing time in late winter and early spring.

In the last couple of decades I purchased an area of light sandy country and developed acidic soil tolerant pastures and carried out a liming and topdressing program which has enhanced winter legume and subtropical grasses. I am now seeing numbers of ground dwelling plovers which I cannot recall ever seeing in the area before. To me it demonstrates how nature can adapt to change. In a similar fashion farmers adapt to market forces and climate variability.

It is very necessary that flexibility in change of landuse be incorporated in future private land management. The invasive native scrub – INS module had restrictions such as cultivation in only 3 years in 15. Such theoretical management constraints are only a means of stopping the landowner from controlling regrowth, in the hope that it will return to scrub! It is often necessary to cultivate for either a fodder or grain crop to reduce the INS seed bank in the soil.

Reasons for landuse change are different in other areas. For instance African lovegrass has become an invasive species in Monaro native grass pastures. It is necessary that those farmers can develop fodder crop/pasture rotations to remain viable.

In north eastern NSW with advances in horticulture new industries could emerge in the river valleys, but to do so in many instances landowners will require a change in landuse.

There are a number of issues in current biodiversity conservation methods which are far from satisfactory.

I know of a case where a farmer was advanced \$20,000 to plant trees along a creek. The property sold and the trees were never planted. What happened to the \$20,000? It seems a lot of these schemes are not properly audited, and no follow up on future management. Many neighbours resent taxpayer money being squandered.

To now answer some of the questions raised in Theme 1

The most successful example of sensible land development I have seen which has been monitored and peer reviewed is on Kevin Mitchell's property 80K's west of Nyngan.

The property owner realized back in the late 1970's that the regrowth phenomenon in that area is renowned for, had to be tackled or the enterprise would quickly become non-viable.

Dick Condon, Western Lands Commissioner at the time worked with Kevin on the planning layout and later on the water spreading technique.

Corridors of the INS were left along drainage lines and stoney ridges with the land developed in between. Over the years regrowth has been controlled, medic species were introduced and native grasses have flourished.

UNE (University of New England) and more lately Western CMA have monitored the environmental and economic changes over 30 odd years.

The figures are very impressive. The diversity of species under the INS was recorded at 47. Over the years the species count continues to increase and has been recorded as high as 351. The amount of soil carbon has doubled. There has been a six fold increase in available soil nitrogen. The livestock carrying capacity at the time of development was as low as a cow and calf to 50 hectares, and has now increased to a cow and calf unit to 9 hectares. This is in 12 inch rainfall country. A fantastic triple bottom line outcome!

This is in an area where many young would be farmers have had to leave the family property and seek an alternate career path, due to the restrictive land clearing legislation preventing any further development.

To answer Theme 1

There should be negotiable guidelines for development along the line of what Kevin Mitchell has achieved. The corridors provide shade, shelter and harbor for native species as well as domestic livestock. They all feed out on the developed country. There is no need for any offset as the clumps and corridors are the offset and help to create the environmental outcome.

My own property, developed in the same era creates a similar picture. I have left native timber on non-arable areas that blend in with the developed land.

#### Theme 2.

The current restrictive land clearing laws fail because they do not provide for a triple bottom line outcome. Kevin Mitchell's example provides conservation of a representation of the native timbers of the area, providing shade and shelter for various species, while the grass species etc flourish in the developed areas, so it provides an environmental outcome, while at the same time providing the necessary economic and social outcome at nil cost to the public! The answers to the questions are obvious. Work with farmers to enhance triple bottom line outcomes instead of getting them offside with great useless blocks of unmanaged scrub.

#### Theme 3.

A strategic planning system could be simply put together by tying in farmer controlled clumps and corridors with nearby public lands such as forest, national parks, stock routes etc. The important thing is that they must be managed, not left to become a liability to the local community.

#### Theme 4

I have already commented how mining offsets do not deliver, and only become a liability to the local community who are unlucky enough to end up with such a purchase in their midst!

It is interesting that the Rural Fires Act gets a mention. The RFS has to abide by an Environmental Assessment Code that is based on the Native Vegetation Act and The Threatened Species Conservation Act. This Code has to be taken into account when developing a bushfire risk management plan. It specifies distances of clearing around various forms of infrastructure.

I am a farmer representative on the bushfire management Committee for Castlereagh RFS Zone. In the recent disastrous bushfire in the Warrumbungle National Park, communication towers on a mountain on the edge of the Park came under threat. The authorities sprayed fire retardant on the tower area and lit up the grazing land around it with incendiaries. The deliberately lit fire burnt out 6 local grazing properties destroying \$1M of fencing and some livestock.

In the aftermath we now find the assessment code only allows 40 metres of clearing around the main tower and 10 metres around the emergency services tower! This is a ridiculous case where commonsense should prevail over the environment. Commonsense would say clear back at least 100 metres or more to make allowance for a crown fire to come down to grass level before it got anywhere near the critical infrastructure.

## Theme 5 Wildlife Management.

Of particular interest to me is the management of human/wildlife interactions and conflict.

The establishment of Schedule 2 land to protect the wild dog is supposed to provide wild dog management plans to contain the wild dog within that land. This system has failed to work in most cases, leading to widespread wild dog predation of domestic livestock.

In most cases the farmers are brow beaten by professional talkfest NPWS officers. The exception are some areas in the south east of NSW where OEH contractually finance full time trappers who are managed and administered by the former LHPA. It remains to be seen if LLS continues the process. I consider such a practice should be extended to all wild dog affected areas of our State.

I note your panel is interested in the welfare of native animals. The Humaneness model dealing with wild dog control dwells on the inhumaneness caused to wild dogs by the use of 1080 and trapping. Nowhere in that model is mentioned one word about the shocking inhumaneness caused by wild dog predation on native wildlife, domestic livestock, nor the social and economic effect on farming families.

The worst kind of neighbour a farmer can have, is one who does not manage his livestock numbers, and allows them to become overstocked, so they come through the boundary fence. This is exactly what happens with wild dog numbers. They eat out the wildlife on public land and overflow onto private land.

Our landscape must be actively managed. Neither our biodiversity, our farmers and our economy and therefore our society will continue to exist in a viable manner without hands on, positive social, economic and environmental outcomes.

Rod Young

