

Native Vegetation Inquiry  
Productivity Commission  
LB2 Collins Street East  
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NSW

18 July 2003

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Re: Inquiry into the Impacts of Native Vegetation and Biodiversity Regulations**

I would like to add some thoughts to the above Inquiry. I am a primary producer in the Central West of NSW. Our property was extensively cleared for grazing and cropping with the last clearing effort as recently as 15 years ago. We are now in the process of rehabilitating our property and introducing farming practices that are compatible with the recovery of pastures and regeneration of native woody plants. The NSW Native Vegetation Conservation Act 1997 does not impact upon us detrimentally and I would suggest that most farmers in the Central West would not be adversely affected by this legislation as most suitable farmland was cleared some time ago. Many of our farming colleagues are now engaged in, or interested in, revegetating parts of the landscape.

The approach to our property comes from the acknowledgement that the farming practices in our region have traditionally regarded native vegetation as an impediment, whereas we believe there are major benefits in retaining and encouraging native vegetation on-farm.

Practically, these benefits are believed to include:

- Shelter and windbreak effects provided by trees and shrubs for stock.
- Soil health benefits: structural and fertility improvements, soil nutrient and moisture interception down slope, prevention of salinity etc.
- Enhanced biodiversity values for our property and the catchment.
- Connectivity between fragments of vegetation i.e. along creeks, ridges, remnant clumps of trees etc.
- Aesthetics and personal satisfaction.
- Certainty for the future – the precautionary principle.

I would like to offer some personal comments on the pro-clearing, anti-legislation debate:

- Native vegetation and its benefits are not 'valued', to the same extent that cleared land is valued as 'developed' country. If the true value of native vegetation was estimated across the population, in terms of the

farm, catchment, bioregion, community now and in the future, then the basis for retention through legislation or other means can be justified. This process will lead to decision-making on 'adjustment' or compensation for retention of native vegetation on farm.

- I will make the generalised observation that land under pressure for clearing appears to be located in areas where opportunity farming is taking place, i.e. in areas that could be regarded as marginal or environmentally sensitive. The costs of this 'development' on the environment are borne by the wider community cumulatively over the long term and I doubt if these costs are incorporated into land values or commodity prices.
- There can be a coexistence of 'green' and farming/development values on the same property. Many farmers are already actively protecting their land *and* farming within sustainable limits. These people should be acknowledged and rewarded.
- Some farmers question the science behind native vegetation legislation, often claiming that they are the best land managers. Observations suggest that this is not always the case and I am yet to see the 'science' behind the farmers' claim.
- Agricultural practices have been traditionally unregulated in Australia and I speculate that some of the animosity towards native vegetation legislation can be attributed to an entrenched anti-government, anti-legislation attitude amongst some farmers. Farmers are not immune to legislation; to claim as such is idealistic. If some farming practices are comparable to industrial or mining practices, then surely it is appropriate to manage and/or regulate such practices (i.e. the clearing of native vegetation) and require rehabilitation in the interests of the community and the environment?
- The issue of compensation for the retention of native vegetation is vexed. I would prefer to see a system of rewarding conservation or 'custodianship', preferably through improved commodity prices. A combined system of incentives, education (supported with sound science) and regulation may be the best approach to retaining vegetation in situ.
- Perhaps people like Jack Sinden or the PC should look at the benefits of vegetation to the landscape, farming and the wider community with the same rigour as applied to 'developed', i.e. cleared land.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this issue.

Yours sincerely,

Nita Lennon