

Mrs Jane Manchee  
NSW

Dear Productivity Commission

**Re: Impacts of Native Vegetation and Biodiversity Regulations.**

Writing as a landholder in the Moree Plains Shire ( North-West NSW) and past landholder In the Waggamba Shire ( South-West Qld) these are my comments on the issues you have listed.

The impact on farming practices: Farmers have been forced to farm all the land they can and have less pasture. Otherwise in this area land values are approximately halved for non-farmed country. I know of two different people who ploughed country because they wanted to maintain their right to be able to farm it in the future (the law states that if it were ploughed before a certain date then the farmer had the right to farm it for the next ten years). We ploughed in pasture that had taken a long time to get established because of the law. These actions could be negative for pasture but positive for productivity (ie there is more money in farming grain than stock at currant stock prices).

For sustainability I think it is such a small area, (only 17% of NSW is freehold and as I understand directly affected by the Native Vegetation Act) compared with the total size of NSW. The heavy black soil plains of northern NSW are the type of soil valued all over the world for its productive farming capacity.

For property values I refer your inquiry to the paper written by JA Sinden, Agricultural and Resource Economics, University of New England. It is the only research into that subject and is done on this area. The Valuer General's Department has always valued land at an unimproved capital value arrived at by looking at land sales and assuming that similar land could have the same potential value. When we wrote to the Valuer General objecting to his latest valuation of our land, stating the amount of native vegetation that we are not allowed to clear and therefore cannot farm, the value of this land was reduced by \$200,000. The return to a landholder of a patch of scrub can be negative if it is just a habitat for feral animals but the law does not understand or care.

Investment patterns---- As a family we would never buy land with any sort of regrowth problem as the "powers that be" have no idea of how difficult it is to manage. Lawmakers all seemingly live in the cities or the south of the state where regeneration is indeed a problem. We have sold a property in Queensland that had a regrowth problem and we did not want to farm.

Finance providers should speak for themselves but seem reluctant. They certainly let us know the obvious, which is that land not farmed, in this district, is worth much less than that which is farmed. This has a big impact on the landholders ability to obtain finance.

I think that affected farmers have some understanding of the law, but it is difficult to be precise as interpretations from departmental officers are very varied, one young officer on our property was quoting internal departmental guidelines, which her superior did not know about. I am sure the law makers had no idea of management of regrowth timber and woody weeds and the fanaticism of some young inexperienced officers when given power over farmers.

The duration of such impacts---- will continue until we have less rigid control from the city . Local areas need goals and the power to achieve them. Local understanding of problems would lead to much more productive outcomes. Landcare is a wonderful organization which has achieved much, but been ignored by government in its desire to rule from the top.

One affect of the law has been to alienate farmers from the Department of Agriculture ( DLWC) in NSW. Where farmers once went for helpful advice they go no more. I include an article from the Land Newspaper July 3, Page 13, and quote Mr Andrew Campbell,head of Land and Water Australia, “ extension in Australia, particularly for natural resource management issues, is a basket case.” He is talking about the loss of all the experienced people from government agencies. In the same article Mr Peters, NSW Farmers President says “ Governments are killing off much of the volunteerism for environmental improvement that has existed in the farming community for generations.” The current rules have no rewards for those who have preserved native vegetation, only lack of income and loss of capital value. Equally for any overdeveloped property there is no encouragement to allow any regeneration. Most land holders are now afraid of any threatened species being found on their property because it will probably cost them money. Is it wise to have laws that so negatively affect the zookeeper? I can vouch for feelings of pride and excitement turning to fear and concealment.

I know of no measures to mitigate negative impacts.

The law was introduced because of the overclearing of very few people, and the gross exaggeration of the greenies. They think parts of our district are “overcleared” that were described by the explorers as vast treeless plains. Some of these treeless plains are now growing trees because farming has protected them from fire and so little trees emerge and survive. An example of exaggeration which recently annoyed me---- last year we were told after a survey of the Pilliga Scrub that there were estimated to be 15000 koala’s living there. This year the Daily Telegraph (Sydney) says that there are only between 1000 and 10,000 koalas in the whole of NSW. The misinformation is mischievous or dangerous.

What is needed are laws which are fair in spreading the burden of cost amongst the whole community: which set local goals for salinity, vegetation management and measure sustainability: and which have some incentives for achievement or forgone profit.

The current law has no respect, because it is unfair, illogical, and not achieving anything productive.