

RF & JR Collins
WA

25th March 2004

RESPONSE to the PUBLIC HEARINGS IN PERTH ON
17th FEBRUARY 2004 AND
SUBMISSION to the WA GOVERNMENT on the
PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION DRAFT REPORT
On the IMPACTS OF NATIVE VEGETATION and
BIODIVERSITY REGULATIONS

We would like to respond to the submission of the WA Government on the Productivity Commission draft report on the impacts of Native Vegetation and Biodiversity Regulations, in particular point 4, page 25 "Discrepancies in relation to the evidence presented to the Productivity Commission by some of Western Australia's 'affected landholders'".

Reference is made to our submission (sub. 182) in paragraphs 2 and 3, and we wish to highlight the arrogance and ignorance of the statements made in these two paragraphs.

They have stated that we purchased our property in 1989, after the clearing regulation was in place. We acknowledge this fact, but in our first submission to the Productivity Commission, we pointed out the fact that before purchasing our property, we specifically enquired of the Ag Dept. in Jerramungup as to whether we would be able to clear the remaining parcel of bush (2000 acres). We have in actual fact, which was clearly stated in our submission, a letter from the Ag. Dept. clearly stating that clearing of this section of bush would not be a problem at all, as long as rocky outcrops and creek lines were left in tact, which is something that every conservation minded farmer does anyway with his valuable land assets.

Before we went ahead and purchased the property with such a large portion of bush on it, we wanted an assurance that we would indeed be able to clear it, and this is why we approached the Ag Dept. with our enquiry, and it was on this proviso that we purchased the property, only after written assurance that we would be able to clear in the future. And this was the reason we went ahead with the property purchase, knowing we had the go ahead in writing from the Ag. Dept to clear bush.

It was our intention to commence clearing this bush immediately and progressively clear portions of it, as we were able to. However, owing to the collapse in the wool industry straight after we purchased the property, we were unable to go ahead with planned development of bush.

We would like to point out that included in this 2000 acres of bush, there is 300 acres of blade-ploughed country which was already partially developed when we purchased the property.

Some years later, we approached Ag Dept. Jerramungup with the intention to commence further development and were informed by the officer concerned when visiting our property, that we could put an application in, but were told that there would be no way that a permit to clear would ever be approved to further develop the 300 acres blade-ploughed portion, and certainly not the virgin bush.

In their submission (point 4, page 25) the WA govt. is stating that we never notified the Commissioner for Soil and Land Conservation of any intention to clear and there has never been a land degradation assessment carried out on our property nor a Soil Conservation Notice issued to restrict clearing. We respond to that statement by saying that there was hardly any point in going through the long and rigorous processes, which would have involved considerable expense to us, when we had been informed already by an official from the Ag Dept. that we would definitely not be able to clear anything at all, ever. These Government officials may have nothing better to do than to throw there "hard earned" money (if they ever had any) out the window, but we cannot afford to throw money into applications if we have already been told they would definitely fail; how stupid do they think we are?

Further in the same paragraph 3 on page 25, they state that we were informed that if we intended to clear we would need to notify the Commissioner and if the notified clearing was subsequently objected, we would be able to apply to the Natural Resources Adjustment Scheme (NRAS). We were not so stupid as not to know this anyway, as anyone wanting to clear land usually does their research as to what is required anyway, and farmers are not dumb. This is a completely made up and false statement. Who was it that told us these things? Have they got a name? No, simply because it is a false allegation, and no one ever said anything like this to us at any stage whatsoever. If the Government is going to claim there are alleged discrepancies in relation to our submission, and state our name, they should at least be telling the truth, because if the truth was written by them, there would be no discrepancies, so how many other lies are they telling? Further to this, we wish to notify the Commissioners that, as many other landholders and ourselves know, clearing permits were never given through this

illegal MOU system instigated by the WAGovt and its' beaurocrats. This illegal system was put in place by the previous government and carried on until now. With this system in place, we knew, as did many others in our position, that there was never any way that any application would make it through this rigorous process, and the WAGovt knows this to be the case, but tries to make it appear that they are trying to cooperate and accommodate farmers with clearing applications and make it appear that they want to help, when they know full well that this is a dead-end process with no results at the end of it which would favor the farmers private property rights, but would only favor themselves and the greenies.

We would like to point out that we know of several farmers who have put in applications to clear, but over the years, as the process drags on, they have been disadvantaged financially and emotionally, as they apply and nothing ever happens, and no results come from it either way; they are just left in limbo. This is the MOU system in action.

The WAGovt has admitted of late that the illegal MOU system has flaws in it and now have come forward and instigated a more honest and upfront regime for complete clearing bans, and surely if farmers' property rights are eroded to this point, we should be compensated for our lost land and any loss of income incurred while this illegal process (MOU) has been in place.

We would like to point out that the WAGovt in their submission referred to the Natural Resources Adjustment Scheme (NRAS) as being a scheme that we should have applied for, however, the funding that could be obtained through this scheme was nowhere near the value of the bush or losses incurred by this regime at the time.

The WAGovt talks about a Natural Resource Adjustment Scheme for the whole of agricultural WA, with an allocation of approx \$1million to cover the whole state, whereas urban areas in the past have had an allocation of \$100million per annum.

The basic right to farm our land has been taken away by beaurocrats in their control of legislation. It seems to us that if Govts (or the public) were to put a fair and equitable value on freehold remnant vegetation no one would want to clear it anyway, and there would not be any of this inequity for a few landholders to bare.

Native vegetation has no value to a lender; it is non-productive. A farmer's ability to borrow is impacted by the ownership of a non-productive and valueless asset.

The WAGovt fails to address the social, economic and physical and emotional stress that is put on individuals above conservation values.

We have made submissions to several different enquiries. One of these was to the Standing Committee on Public Administration and Finance, the Inquiry into the Impact of State Government actions and processes on the use and enjoyment of freehold and leasehold land in Western Australia. To date the WAGovt has refused to acknowledge this inquiry, and has gone ahead implementing clearing restrictions on the farming community without the democratic process of listening to farmers' concerns on this very important matter which were put forward through this Inquiry. This shows a sheer disrespect by the Gallop govt for farmers affected by rural issues relating to private property rights and the right to farm their freehold land and earn a living for their families. No wonder farmers are leaving the land at an alarming rate when the Govt beurocrats stand over us and treat us as though we have no democratic rights. (Is this a democratic government? – it is questionable!!)

In conclusion, as we showed in our original submission, we no longer have the ability to carry on with our farming life, which has been our way of life since birth, as this has been taken away from us unfairly and resulted in the forced sale of our farm. We still have ownership of 2000 acres of uncleared virgin bush which we are told has no value whatsoever, but on the other hand is far too precious to ever think of clearing for farming, so the very least that the government should be doing is compensating us for the loss of our freehold land and losses that we have incurred through this process. The government and public seem to think they have the right to demand that we keep this land in its' present unproductive state for public good conservation, so haven't we got the right to expect something in return?

Yours faithfully

Ron & Jennifer Collins & family.