

July 14, 2003

The Committee Manager
Standing Committee on Natural Resource
Management
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney 2000

Dear Sir

Thank you for the opportunity to lodge a submission to the Standing Committee on the issue of Natural Resource Management.

This submission will focus primarily on the current disincentives that exist for ecologically sustainable land and water use in New South Wales, and the options for the removal of such disincentives and any consequences in doing so.

The area that I wish to refer to is covered by the North Lachlan-Bogan Regional Vegetation Management Region, in the local government area of the Bogan Shire and that part of the Lachlan Shire north of the Lachlan River, and covers approximately 2.3 million hectares of the central west plains.

For many years the landholders within this area have been battling the encroachment of woody weeds and shrubs on their land, with varying degrees of success. Because of the invasive nature of the woody weeds (locally referred to as 'regrowth') severe land and water degradation occurs on these lands. Due to the competition for moisture, groundcover is almost non-existent, leaving large areas of bare ground open to erosion by wind and water. Any significant rain event will carry large amounts of dirt and debris with the flow of water, with little, if any, moisture penetration occurring locally. (Examples of this landscape are provided in Attachment A).

Without human intervention, the long term outlook for this country is continued degradation, worsening water quality, and no prospect of stabilising these negative impacts.

Following the introduction of SEPP-46 and then the Native Vegetation Conservation Act, 1997, management options for this country have been effectively removed.

Much of the regrowth that occurs on this land is of greater than 10 years of age and as such, falls outside of the exemptions to the Act. Development applications lodged with the then DLWC were refused or had restrictions placed on development that were prohibitive to the landholder to proceed with any work.

There is a complete lack of recognition as to the nature of regrowth from within the Government agencies that are supposedly in charge of managing our natural resources, in spite of the fact that much of the earlier science published had been prepared and researched by government employees including the Soil Conservation Service and Western Lands Commission.

The professional relationship between agency staff and landholders, particularly within this North Lachlan-Bogan region, has reached an all time low, and will take at least 2 generations to rebuild. The behaviour that our children are witnessing of these Government officials, and the impact of the legislation that has been introduced, will remain with them throughout their careers.

The problems that are being faced within this North Lachlan-Bogan region **can** be addressed in such a way that will provide a positive environmental outcome and provide additional opportunities for the future of agricultural production within this region.

If the NSW Government continues on its path of denial of these land management issues, then the responsibility for the continued severe land degradation that is currently occurring out here will rest solely with them.

It is our duty as the landholders and managers of this land to care for it, and to take those steps that will not only prevent further degradation but improve and remediate that degradation that has already occurred.

It is the contention of the residents within the North Lachlan-Bogan region that this remediation work can most effectively be accomplished by the introduction of the Draft Regional Vegetation Management Plan for the North Lachlan-Bogan Region, Community Version, April 2003 (Attachment B).

This plan is the culmination of four years of work within the Vegetation Committee framework, and is widely accepted within this community as the most equitable and balanced path forward for the Region.

It is unfortunate that several members of the Regional Vegetation Committee felt unable to continue with the final development of this plan, and that they were incapable of separating their own personal agendas from the needs of this region. The Committee was charged with the responsibility to develop a **regional** plan that would provide the best path forward for native vegetation management, not with achieving the total removal of land management options on all undeveloped land within this region.

The consequences of introducing this Draft Plan will be

- the recovery of groundcover,
- the restoration of the balance between trees and grasses,
- the removal of the current 'monoculture' that exists in parts of this region,

- the provision of habitat that is more amenable to a variety of fauna that have been forced out of this region due to the impact of woody weeds on their preferred habitat,
- the remediation of significant areas of gully erosion,
- the improvement in the quality of water runoff during significant rain events,
- the improvement of water penetration locally during any rain events,
- the effective use of water through more receptive ground covers, including improved pastures, that will prevent leakage.

It is anticipated that with the introduction of the Draft Plan, a further ten (10%) of the region will be developed. As current levels of development are approximately 30%, this does not represent a significant change to the region in view of the additional benefits that will be achieved.

All members of the region have undertaken to allow 15% of their own personal rural land holdings to remain undeveloped, as their contribution to conservation outcomes within this region. This is well above the current area being suggested within the State for such areas of retention, and represents the 'equity of conservation' component of the Draft Plan.

It is imperative that the land management tools required for woody weeds and shrubs be identified as such, and be treated as a different issue to the clearing of remnant native vegetation. They are clearly two quite different issues, and deserve the appropriate attention being directed towards each to achieve acceptable and equitable outcomes within the State.

I have not included any current consideration for compensation to landholders negatively impacted on by the NVC Act – it is far more important that the land degradation be dealt with as the primary concern. Paying landholders to allow them the privilege of watching their precious soils wash away and landscape balance being lost is surely the **least** preferred option!

An analysis of the compensation requirements for this region was undertaken in May 2001, with the proposal for a 'Limbo Lease' (Attachment C) being released within the region and a survey undertaken to quantify the impacts of the loss of land management (Attachment D). The changes to land values within this region over the past two years will have a significant effect on these figures, with improved land now being valued at 1.5 times the 2001 values, and unimproved land having no commercial value (\$0 per hectare). This proposal was not pursued past this initial stage, as a return of management options was, and is, the preferred outcome.

There are so many individual issues that are affecting this region with regards to the impacts of woody weeds that are best identified through personal experience. However after having hosted over 30 such visits by 'eminent' persons including the NSW Premier; two Ministers for Land and Water; 4 members of NSW Country Labour; Director-General, Land and Water; various staff from the Premiers Office; members of the Opposition; the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage (Inquiry into Public Good Conservation); the Productivity Commission (Inquiry into Impacts of Native Vegetation and Biodiversity Regulations) - an invitation to visit this area would be superfluous!!

Your interest in this issue is commendable, and our region in particular will be following the course of your determinations with great interest.

Yours sincerely

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Attachments:

- A Landscape Photos
- B Draft Regional Vegetation Management Plan for the North Lachlan-Bogan Region Community Version, April 2003
- C 'Limbo Lease' proposal
- D Analysis of 'Limbo Lease' survey results
- E Submission to 'Inquiry into Public Good Conservation'



A 'mono-culture' of white cypress pine regrowth.

These trees will remain at this size for decades. They are so dense; they have become 'locked-up'.

Note the lack of groundcover.



Certain elements of the green movement believe this soil erosion to be a natural state of events.



Areas that have been thinned of woody weed regrowth show excellent establishment of native grass species; hence an increase in plant and animal diversity. This area can also be sustainably grazed. Note the native vegetation corridor in the background for threatened species etc.



Plate 1:



Plate 8:



Plate 3:



Plate 4:



Plate 5:



Plate 6:



Plate 7:



Plate 8:



Plate 9: