

**Submission
No 17**

INQUIRY INTO ASPECTS OF AGRICULTURE IN NSW

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Inquiry into aspects of agriculture in NSW

Dear Sirs and/or Madams,

I am a 3rd generation farmer at a small (370 hectare) farm in the Lower Bago (near Batlow) region of NSW, we produce cattle. There are many NSW State Forest Pine Plantations and more recently, private pine plantations in our area, so we are quite used to Forests as neighbours.

I understand the current initiative for pine plantations is 3 million hectares planted by or before 2020.

However. "Australian native forests are an important component of the Australian landscape, comprising 164 million ha or around 21 per cent of the continent landmass."

(<http://arts.monash.edu.au/ges/research/climate/Mountainash/index.html>).

Land is a finite resource. so I argue that the only source of land for 3 million hectares of afforestation ventures has to be land bought from persons who had previously pursued traditional agricultural pursuits.

There is no more singular impediment to sustaining appropriate levels of productive capacity in agriculture in NSW or Australia in general, than the loss of traditional agricultural lands to any other non primary production industry. other than the issue of water...

Water, or more particularly, lack of water, in agriculture singularly has the most significant impact on sustainable productivity, as has been recently evidenced by the last few long years of drought. I am convinced

that the current pine plantation year 2020 target has ignored the crucial aspect of water usage.

It is not the creation of forests that have increased waterway flows, in fact quite the opposite, "The increased water yields from the Murrumbidgee are almost certainly due to the extensive clearing which has taken place during this century."

<http://www.forest.nsw.gov.au/currentaffairs/releases/140599.asp> ;

Malcolm Turnbull on the ABC's 7.30 Report 17/7/2007 stated "We have a global initiative on forests and climate"

<http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2007/s1981001.htm> , yet when it

comes to forestry, no mention is ever made about water usage, only greenhouse emissions, biodiversity and de-carbonisation, erosion control and salinity reduction.

I have been informed that pine has an average use of 1.5 megalitres water per hectare per year, so 3 million hectares of pine will use 4500 Gigalitres before a single drop will reach the waterways and catchments of our streams, creeks, and rivers, which have already been recognised as being in crisis.

Granted, one has to apportion the amount of the 3 million hectares that will be in NSW, but lets put 4500 Gigalitres of water into perspective: I am lead to believe that 4500 gigalitres is in the order of three times the amount of water that flowed down the Murray River in 2006.

Prime, already cleared, mostly plantable Primary producers' land (ie "perfect" farming land) in higher rainfall regions of NSW is the target for new pine plantations. More pine plantation in high rainfall areas will lead to a significant decrease in water reaching catchments when compared to the water used on the same land for current

agricultural purposes. "The National Water Initiative identifies large scale afforestation as a land use change that may intercept significant volumes of surface and ground water" and "trees use more water than annual crops and intercept more water than pastures" (IFA Forestry Policy Statement Number 5.2 approved 3rd June 2007).

Also, "Run off reduction increases with increasing rainfall"

http://www.affashop.gov.au/PdfFiles/sfdm_plantations.pdf .

When the land is no longer available in high rainfall areas plantations will be forced to go to areas of lesser rainfall.

The loss of water in our waterways severely restricts wholesale productive capacity. Just talk to the Irrigators in the MIA who are currently facing diminished or completely cut out water allocations already; and ask them how their productivity has been affected, and how sustainable their productivity will be if the current state of affairs continues.

Reduction in agriculture in areas such as the MIA have significant impacts to the NSW agricultural economy, "Although irrigated agriculture covers only about 1.4% of the total land area of the Murray Darling Basin, it accounts for around 36% of the total profit generated from agriculture"

http://www.clw.csiro.au/research/society/peru/mdbc_report.html .

I realise addressing this issue is complicated, however the recent highlighting of the issue of water and the Murray-Darling Basin and factors affecting water getting into the system surely means that some significance be placed on water as a stand-alone issue in terms of sustainable agricultural productivity in NSW.

I am not opposed to Pine plantations, though perhaps one could argue that other varieties of tree may transpire better, but pine

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plantations are a good example of an industry being promoted at the expense of both agriculture in the classic sense, and water use, and this is the issue that should become commonly recognised.

To these issues, add an acknowledged decline in persons wishing to pursue primary production as a career and increased rural suicide rates. Science, best practises and management principles all serve to increase productivity, in any industry.

Less primary producers will be asked to be more efficient (ie more productive) with less resources, but eventually that is never long term sustainable.

A growing population is also placing increased demands on productivity, and a simple economic argument of demand and supply says that any reduction of basic resources (in this case land and water) will lead directly to an "at the till" increase, thus driving an ongoing rise in inflation. The final significant impediment to agricultural productivity will be significantly increasing energy costs, whether that be fossil fuel prices or other energy sources such as electricity, which is expected to increase in price quite significantly in the very near future.

Perhaps it is time to looking to introduce some incentives for primary Producers. rather than impediments.

After all, it seems to have been forgotten that agriculture was the backbone on which this country was built!

Yours sincerely,
Grant Bunter.