Native Vegetation Clearing Submission

As a concerned group of farmers we appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the Native Vegetation laws. It is our belief that the current complex laws are better suited to the clearing of housing blocks and suburban sprawl. A separate set of guidelines needs to be introduced that is specific to a “commercial farmer” (definition as per taxation law), that addresses issues surrounding scatter trees.

Earlier this year the Andrew’s Government released their Food and Fibre Strategy where they note;

“Our domestic market is growing and together with increasing global demand from a fast growing middle class population in Asia, the future for the sector is bright. However, we can’t be complacent, and we need a long term plan. This strategy will help capture future opportunities, and address the challenges faced by our primary producers and food and fibre manufactures.”

As farmers need to compete in the world market we constantly have to find ways to increase efficiencies to stay competitive and viable. With recent adoption of GPS, farming equipment constantly getting wider and drones becoming the next exciting advance in production opportunities, scatter trees are having a huge impact on a farmers ability to manage our land and take full advantage of the efficiency gains that are available through these new technologies.

Farmers are making up to ten passes over each paddock every year and with the over application of chemicals and fertiliser, damage caused to machinery by fallen limbs beneath the crop canopy during harvest and hay cutting, time spent cleaning around each tree prior to crops and pasture establishment and lost production due to moisture stress and weeds, every scatter tree costs each farmer over $300/year.

Under the current regulations the permit process is so time consuming and complicated with overlays, photographs, habitat assessments and biodiversity scores and often with differing interpretations between the three tiers of government that most farmers become disillusioned and frustrated.

Therefore we are proposing a new set of sustainable laws that will reduce the risk of offsets failing and having any net loss, to a significant net gain for the environment.

Farmers will need to provide an established offset at a ratio of 5 new trees to remove 1 scatter tree, these offsets need to be like for like or of higher value and can be either 12 month old plantations or saplings less than 10 years with a density of 250 per hectare. Alternatively protect 3 old trees for regeneration to remove 1 scatter tree before they can proceed with a permit.

These offsets can be transferred to a site on your property of greater environmental significance, where they can be protected in corridors to create better connectivity pathways and eco systems. Offsets need to be fenced and marked on a council register or a 173 covenant and can be viewed via satellite imagery.
This process would reduce the time that local government would need to spend checking and assessing the value of the native vegetation to be cleared and giving it a score and returning several times to check for compliance and survival rates.

A full exemption should apply to fence lines. Trees removed along fence lines should not require an offset. Fence lines define boundaries between properties, crown land and towns and need to be maintained and kept in good condition to protect the public against stock. A fire break can also be put in along fence lines to reduce the risk of fire causing damage to state parks, native bushland, rural property and communities.

In Summary, the majority of native scattered trees are now reaching maturity and are at the end of their productive life. This proposed reform to the Native Vegetation act will encourage farmers to start planting and protecting the next generation of native trees and add significant net gains to our sustainable environment.