

Dear Sir

My Submission to NRC re improving biodiversity and supporting land holders in regional landscapes.

Native Veg on the Monaro.

What is the aim of the legislation in a Monaro context?

- To protect remnant native vegetation and threatened ecological communities on the Monaro.

Issues

Triple bottom line outcomes

- Environmental
Saving remnant native vegetation and threatened ecological communities on the Monaro.
- Economic
Allowing land managers to operate profitably so they can afford to spend time and money preserving these special communities.
- Social
Allowing Land Managers and other stakeholders to work together toward a common goal.

We need KPIs.

- Biodiversity Conservation Targets (quoting Stuart Burge).
 - Native Grasslands of High Conservation Value: 5 800 to 7 500 ha.
 - Native Grasslands of Medium Conservation Value: 90 000 ha.
 - Native Grassy Woodlands of High Conservation Value: 15 660 ha.
- Area of Monaro (Snowy Monaro Regional Council) 1,516,400 ha.
 - Biodiversity Conservation Target 7.5% of SMRC

Trust

- Needs to work both ways. Both Land Managers and other stakeholders need to trust the process.
- One point of reference. One hoop to jump through. Not the three levels of legislation we negotiate at present. The KISS principle must apply here.
- Farmers are key to protecting biodiversity. They are the present custodians.
- Regulation does not work, has never worked (note present lovegrass situation)
- The premiss of guilty until proven innocent must be reversed in the legislation. To do this, accurate mapping of what we are trying to protect is essential.
- The situation unfolding in West Wyalong is not garnering any trust in the mapping, the legislation or the department staff involved.

<https://www.facebook.com/WINNewsRiverina/videos/7810293069095034>

Maps

- Mapping is of disturbance NOT native vegetation
- Map is at best, only 15% accurate for Native Veg on the Monaro
 - 65% yellow (draft regulated area)
 - Looking for 6-10% (estimated area worth conserving)
- Maps should not be gazetted until they can map the grassland communities we are trying to protect.
- Question. All local roads and some farm laneways are mapped as regulated. Does this mean both Council and farmers cannot maintain (disturb) roads? Presumably this is not correct.

- The maps must always be easily edited for accuracy.

Farmers need to be compensated for the community good of conserving biodiversity

- At present, dept of environment (? government, community) can regulate as much land as they like at no cost to them. The only cost is to farmers.
- Keeping country weed free costs money.
From \$300/ha - Effective lovegrass control “at the Coal face” (Ross Sherlock)
To \$0/ha where land managers do nothing (no weeds or, more likely, have given up). This cost at present is born by the land manager, not the community.
- There is a “lost productivity” cost of keeping country “native”.

Solution

- Interim use of Stuart Burge’s Kangaroo Grass strategy until maps are accurate.
- Farm maps where remnant native vegetation and threatened ecological communities are mapped and conserved.
- Land managers with over a certain percentage of land regulated are compensated.

Outcomes

- All stakeholders know where the high and medium conservation areas are.
- Farmers know what land they need to protect AND community helps them protect it.
- Farmers are also able to manage the rest of their country as they see fit.
- With this approach, the community can also see the rate of weed invasion (African lovegrass). They can then work out what they are willing to do to help conserve the biodiversity and productivity of our Monaro Grasslands.

Further suggestions for maintaining biodiversity and farm profitability on the Monaro

- Allowing /Encouraging buffer zones. We are losing the battle with Lovegrass; something needs to change. Ross Sherlock’s presentation was/is frightening.
<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1127335455249192>
- The present “local” (council area) weed plans, in Monaro’s case 15,164 sq km, are too big and so engender very little peer group pressure. We need much smaller, locality-based weed plans. Community members will then see what controlling weeds means to their neighbours.

Weeds, I believe, are the most threatening process to the biodiversity of our Monaro grasslands. As a community we have tried the big stick approach of regulation on weed control. It has not worked. Peer group pressure, helping your neighbours, accepting weeds as a community, whole of landscape problem, is the only solution I can see. Weeds are like a slow-moving bushfire, and like bushfires, we all need to work together to control them.

The Achilles heel of the legislation. The legislations (plural) are a “big stick” approach on the very people who are the custodians of Monaro grasslands. If land managers stop controlling weeds, there will be no biodiversity (native vegetation) of any value, to save. There are better solutions than the present legislations.

Your sincerely

Craig Mitchell

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