

Biodiversity Reforms - Have Your Say
PO Box A290
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NSW 1232

28 June 2016

Dharriwaa Elders Group ("DEG") is an association formed in 2000 by Walgett Aboriginal Elders after they came together to maintain their community's cultural identity and wellbeing – through various community development initiatives since 1999. The DEG teaches about places on country important to the Walgett community. Members believe that a healthy river and environment supports healthy people. In addition, DEG believes that environmental values are and will be an important resource for our community's social and economic wellbeing. We have the knowledge to use these resources in ways that can benefit many, none of which will be possible if we allow a reduction in biodiversity.

DEG is very concerned about reports that our NSW Barwon MP declared in June 2016 in a Narrabri Council meeting that at the moment only 30% of country west of Walgett is cleared and after the new laws are enforced in 2017 he believes 70% of land will be cleared. This is a shocking statement that should not be supported by any responsible government.

DEG needs assurances that the proposed new legislation will not result in a lot more clearing of native vegetation and therefore a loss of more species and important Aboriginal cultural places.

We believe that Aboriginal communities were excluded from a properly consultative process regarding the reform of the existing Native Vegetation and Threatened Species Conservation Acts. These laws seemed to be working. The only problems with the existing laws are they are under-resourced, causing farmers' resentment and lack of education and understanding about the benefits of biodiversity. Our members and staff have borne some of this resentment personally – and we are told that it is only after pressure from Walgett farmers that these Acts are being reformed. These same farmers were only recently applying for drought relief funds – indicating that climate change is turning broadacre cropping into an uneconomic landuse anyway in the Walgett area. In addition there is a powerful mining and petroleum industry lobby in North West NSW. In our experience opal miners have never been held accountable for the local and cumulative impacts of their actions on biodiversity. Why should the native birds and animals of NSW suffer because Kevin Humphries may retain the votes of a handful of wealthy farmers and the mining lobby? Why should a new regime be introduced at great expense, when biodiversity values would benefit more from keeping the existing laws with improved budgets?

For changes to be acceptable to DEG we would need to have them explained clearly by independent scientists, and managed by appropriately resourced environmental agencies. Not the Local Land Service which is currently controlled by local farmers, or the Minister for Resources and Energy. Both entities have perceived conflicts of interests. We fear that instead of maintaining and improving biodiversity the proposed new regime sets the theme for decline and a huge loss, including of potential benefits, for our community.

Yours sincerely


Virginia Robinson, Secretary Dharriwaa Elders Group.