

To: NSW Premier
The Hon Gladys Berejiklian
Delivered by email to: willoughby@parliament.nsw.gov.au

17 August 2018

Walgett's Dharriwaa Elders Group appeals the deferral of new land clearing laws

The Dharriwaa Elders Group ("DEG") writes to express great concern for the introduction of the Biodiversity Conservation Act on 24 August 2017, before the Native Vegetation Regulatory Map and other accompanying regulations that define where and how clearing can occur have been completed, and endorsed by scientists¹. If the Act proceeds next week the NSW government will be allowing farmers to self-interpret what is regulated and unregulated land. Farmers can't be prosecuted if they make an "accident" and exploit this loophole as fast as they can before proper controls are put in place. **We have decided we cannot let this happen without appealing to you directly to intervene.**

We live in Walgett and witness and suffer from a lack of monitoring for compliance of environment, water and NSW National Parks and Wildlife legislation. We understand from the media that ICAC and other bodies are investigating water theft from the rivers that supply our community's lifeblood. Yet your government could be acting this month to allow the same and other farmers expand their cultivation areas, remove all clumps of trees and single trees in paddocks and enable the clearing of high value woodland for new cultivation land by replanting degraded cropping land. Your government could be ignoring the protection of koala habitat and big mature trees that are a home to many hollow-dependent species including threatened species in our region. Your government could be condoning farmers in our region to destroy the last remaining network of remnant native vegetation on private lands, because you have allowed this process to be rushed and have ignored warnings from reputable scientists. It seems that all endangered ecological communities are fair game. Are you confident that your government is acting in the best interest of NSW when current allegations that imply high level corruption are being investigated, and your departments are reducing environmental compliance resources?

Many properties surrounding Walgett are overcleared already. This overclearing must be investigated and the environment compensated. Environmental scientists who know our region must be engaged by an independent investigation of existing and past environmental breaches and to undertake an independent review of the regulations, which must be changed according to their recommendations.

Since the DEG began in 1999 we have been working to protect the Aboriginal Cultural Values of the Walgett area and this includes biodiversity. If you do not listen to us, you will be winding back the clock and ruining much hard work undertaken by our volunteers. You will be contributing to the trauma suffered daily by our community. We know that wellbeing of Aboriginal communities is affected by access to a healthy

¹ <https://www.landmanagement.nsw.gov.au/>

country. This is well-documented. You must know of the importance of biodiversity to the NSW economy. We appeal in the strongest terms that you must not let this new legislation be introduced before proper consideration and planning has been undertaken.

If you do, many hectares of native vegetation will be cleared before the next election. Many birds and animals will disappear from our region. This damage will require large public funds to try and repair (if in fact repair is possible). The short term greed of a handful of farmers must not be subsidized in return for willful damage of the environment, birds and animals and our health.

We also appeal to you to investigate why our submission and those of many highly respected scientists to the Biodiversity Reforms – Have Your Say in June 2016 has been ignored?

The values that make our area unique, special and increasingly visited by tourists thereby contributing employment and economic activity to our disadvantaged town are threatened if you do not intervene and examine the impacts of the proposed Act.

We write to appeal you to apply your immediate attention to this risk and advise us in Walgett of your actions.

Yours sincerely 

Clem Dodd

Speaker for and on behalf of the Dharriwaa Elders Group