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Regional focus a key to feedback

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We need to argue the case for a region by region basis

The review panel has found plenty of people passionate about native vegetation

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FARMERS across the State hope their concerns don't get drowned out by the last-minute pile of submissions on the Biodiversity Legislation Review that has swamped the review panel.

More than 400 submissions were received for the review, which seeks to streamline a bundle of environmental legislation, including the Native Vegetation Act, which had caused much anger for farmers over land clearing issues.

"It's obviously a subject people feel very strongly about," said head of the review panel, Dr Neil Byron.

"We're drowning in paper."

Seeking regional-based solutions, getting better recognition for farmers' environmental work and encouraging a commonsense approach to land clearing were among the main points of rural-based submissions.

"We need to argue the case for a region by region basis (for native vegetation issues and land clearing)," said Walgett mayor Bill Murray, who made a submission on behalf of the council.

Cr Murray said this approach could make a big difference to the Walgett Shire.

"About 80 per cent of the shire is flood plains... with five intersecting rivers. It's ideal farming country," he said.

At Walgett, the land could cope with a balance more in favour of economy than ecology.

Near Moree at "Manaroo", Robert Anderson also favoured a regional-specific approach.

Mr Anderson said one-size-fits-all property vegetation plans needed to be scrapped.

He also wanted commonsense to be considered in offsets required when farmers cleared trees.

Mr Anderson estimated taking a tree out of a paddock would gain a farmer about \$40 in extra crop yield and reduced weed control, however, it would cost the farmer \$1750 to plant and maintain the 20 trees needed to offset the clearing.

"It's farcical," he said.

The work farmers did to look after the environment also needed to be recognised.

"There will always be one or two per cent who do the wrong thing, but the majority of farmers (especially on family-owned farms) look after the land for future generations," he said.

NSW Farmers made a similar point.

"Farmers are not the landscape's adversaries, our management practices have evolved to be more efficient with less, to sustainably produce food and fibre in combination with providing ecosystem services," NSW Farmers' submission stated.

"The policy framework is focused on micro-management of individual plants and properties, with decision-making taking place via 'black-box' software, its settings controlled by the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH).

"This approach has failed procedurally and substantively."

NSW Farmers' submission noted the organisation supported the end of broad-scale clearing where that clearing was not in the interests of rural communities and the environment, and the legislation should balance social, economic and environmental outcomes.

The review includes the Threatened Species Conservation Act, the Nature Conservation Trust Act, and parts of the National Parks and Wildlife Act.

The interim report is due on October 18 and a final report is due on December 18.

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