 **Landcare Broken Hill Inc**

***Greening the Hill Mk.2***

ABC Radio interview No.21 – 17 September 2019

**VEGETATION CLEARING vs TREE PLANTING**

Throughout Landcare Broken Hill’s ***Greening the Hill Mk2*** Initiative I have been speaking about how the projects interlock – they represent a holistic approach to better manage our environment. I’ve described how:

1. Project 1 is aimed at ensuring the Regeneration Belt around the City can be safeguarded – so that it can continue to perform its original function to stabilise the soil around the City so as to minimise wind-blown dust;
2. Project 2, being the community native plant propagation nursery, from which we hope that one day we’ll grow 100,000s of seedling plants for planting out in degraded areas in and around the City;
3. Project 3, being our Backyard Bush Nursery Project, whereby we’ve enlisted a great number of keen people in the Broken Hill community to grow plants to be eventually planted out in the City’s reserves and parks;
4. Project 5, being the Green Schools Project, whereby Landcare will partner with kids in all the City’s schools to carry out various greening projects;
5. Project 6, being the Street Tree planting campaign – to encourage people to proactively replant their naturestrips – so that we can get more tree cover in the City;
6. Project 7, being that project focussed on rejuvenating our City’s recreational parks, such as the parks used for sport;
7. Project 9, being the project aimed at re-greening community places – which we kicked off with the landscaping of the 3rd Broken Hill Sea Scouts’ grounds;
8. Project 12, being the Keeping Tree Project, which is a campaign project aimed at achieving behavioural change – so that the removal of a tree is accepted as being a last resort action – in other words, we must strive to keep as many plants and trees as possible.

**In this list I’ve selected just a few of our 38 Greening the Hill Mk2 projects. What is the common theme, the common objective? Get and keep plants in the ground, keep moisture in the ground, save our topsoil, lessen windblown dust, and generally, help to keep temperatures down by increasing vegetationcover. That’s where our work is focussed. That is the primary objective of most Landcare groups.**

**Natural Resources Commission Report to State Cabinet**

In that context, it was extraordinarily concerning to hear last Friday that the NSW Natural Resources Commission, an independent Government appointed body, has a report going to State Cabinet, commissioned by the Premier on 14 January, that reveals that over 20,000 hectares of land – **27,100 hectares in fact** - has been cleared of its tree cover in NSW during 2017-18. By Cabinet agreement back in 2017, when clearing exceeds 20,000 ha, a review such as has now been conducted by the NRC is to occur. The report reveals that the rate of clearing native vegetation in NSW has been skyrocketing.

The Government has had the report for six weeks, but it will shortly go to Cabinet. Details are scarce as the NRC Review Report has been prepared as a “cabinet in confidence” paper. It was a ‘closed’ review, without any public input being invited.

The massive increase in native vegetation clearing has been since the NSW Government’s new *Biodiversity Conservation Act* came into operation in August 2017. Serious questions are being raised whether there has been any favourable outcomes for biodiversity in NSW.

Sadly, the massive clearing has been carried out in for the purposes of large-scale farming.

In my opinion, time and time again it has been shown that such vegetation clearance usually gives an advantage to one-generation, at best two generations, before the natural systems degrade. Examples around the world demonstrate how dust bowls are created, how the de-stabilized top-soil deteriorates and becomes wind-blown. The legacy of such native vegetation clearance is to curse future generations. Australian soils are a fragile resource, made particularly so do to our drying environment and extreme temperatures.

There is even a suggestion that large-scale farming enterprises will be given even greater freedom to be able to clear without a permit, to allow a ‘regional code’ approach in Northern NSW. A pilot ‘regional code’ approach has already been run near Walgett.

The massive clearance is causing tension within the State Government with the environment minister Matt Kean and the planning & public places minister Rob Stokes being concerned with the exponential increase in land clearing. The Nationals in the State Government are in favour of allowing this massive land clearing.

In August the State Government, per the Agricultural Minister Adam Marshall, gave an amnesty to those who had illegally cleared land under the old Native Vegetation Act. He announced that there will be no new prosecutions for breaches of the old law. It is believed that 100s of cases were in the pipeline. Land clearance had soared: 9,200 ha in 2013-14 to 20,200 in 2016-17. The “hot spots” for land clearing are around Moree, Bourke and the Northern Tablelands.

With land clearing reaching 27,100 ha in 2017-18, it tripled the rate of clearing in 2014-15. It is understood the clearing in 2018-19 will prove to be greater still. Grazing country, which usually retains a good percentage of native tree cover, is being replaced by large-scale commercial farming operations for wheat, cotton, soya beans, chick peas and Lucerne.

**So just focussing on the 2017-18 year with 27,100 ha (or just on 67,000 acres) of native vegetation cleared, I rhetorically ask how many 1000s of Landcare volunteers, putting in how many thousands of hours of hard work in growing and planting trees, would it take to compensate for that level of land clearing?**

**We are sorely challenged by this imbalance across the State, but none of us can afford to give up. Greening the Hill Mk2 must proceed and flourish.**

**The next public meeting of *GREENING THE HILL MK.2* will be at Centre for Community, 200 Beryl Street, Thursday 26 September 7.00pm**

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