



# ***AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE***

**Members present:**

Mr GJ Butcher MP (Chair)  
Mr AJ Perrett MP  
Mrs J Gilbert MP  
Mr JE Madden MP  
Mr EJ Sorensen MP

**Staff present:**

Mr R Hansen (Research Director)

## **PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO THE VEGETATION MANAGEMENT (REINSTATEMENT) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

### **TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS**

**WEDNESDAY, 1 JUNE 2016**

**Gympie**

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### Committee met at 4.30 pm

**CHAIR:** Good evening, everyone. I declare open the Agriculture and Environment Committee's public hearing in relation to its inquiry into the Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting today. My name is Glenn Butcher MP, and I am the committee chair and member for Gladstone. Tonight I have with me Mr Tony Perrett, who as most of you might know is the member for Gympie and the deputy chair of the committee; Mrs Julieanne Gilbert, the member for Mackay; Mr Jim Madden, the member for Ipswich West; and Mr Ted Sorensen, the member for Hervey Bay. Mr Robbie Katter from Mount Isa cannot be with us tonight.

This bill was referred to the committee on 17 March 2016 and the committee is required to report to the parliament on 30 June 2016. Submissions accepted by the committee are published on the committee's inquiry web page. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath tonight, but I do remind witnesses that intentionally misleading the committee is a very serious offence. I remind those present that these proceedings are similar to parliament and are subject to the Legislative Assembly's standing rules and orders. In this regard, I remind members of the public that under the standing orders the public may be admitted to or excluded from the hearing at the discretion of this committee.

Mobile phones and other electronic devices should now be turned off or switched to silent. Hansard is making a transcript of proceedings tonight. The committee intends to publish the transcript of tonight's proceedings unless there is a good reason not to. Those here tonight should note that the media may be present so it is possible that you might be filmed or photographed.

Before I invite the first witness to address the committee, can those people who wish to speak to the committee during the open forum part of the hearing please ensure they have filled out a green witness form and returned it to our research director, Mr Rob Hansen, who is standing to my left. This will help us ensure that everyone who wants to speak to the committee has the opportunity to do so. Please note that presentations to the committee during the open forum part of this evening will be limited to five-minute presentations. I ask witnesses to please identify themselves when they come up to speak and to speak clearly and at a reasonable pace.

### DALY, Ms Michelle, Coordinator, Kola Action Group

**CHAIR:** Welcome. Ms Daly, would you care to make a brief opening statement of approximately five to 10 minutes.

**Ms Daly:** Do stop me if I get to that point. As the first witness to appear at this hearing in Gympie, I would like to thank the committee for coming to our region and providing this opportunity. I was personally very pleased that this issue was referred to a parliamentary committee, because I believe this consultative committee process offers us the best hope of ending up with a balanced vegetation management bill that can stand the test of time.

As you will see from our submission, ours is a group of concerned citizens who are working together to try to give koalas a chance to continue to be part of our region's special biodiversity. We do understand that the Vegetation Management Act is only one part of a confusing array of legislation at all government levels that may impact on koalas and their habitat but it is a vital part, especially outside the south-east corner of Queensland—Noosa south—that at least has the koala state planning regulatory provisions that regulate development.

Today our group wants to specifically address why we support the proposals to restore regulation of high-value regrowth that has biodiversity and conservation values. Mr Perrett, I read your question to a witness at a North Queensland hearing along these lines. You asked what their understanding was of the essential habitat mapping, how that interlinks and therefore what their concerns were with vegetation management. You suggested, as Andrew Cripps did in response to my question at the forum we had here a little while ago, that the essential habitat mapping protects those species.

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I do understand that question because my understanding also is that essential habitat mapping is designed to identify essential habitat for flora and fauna species of conservation significance. I would say that if this mapping was of high quality and precision across the whole range of koalas in this state I would most likely not be sitting here today, but we are all too familiar with the limitations and inaccuracy of mapping. We cannot assume that essential habitat mapping is accurate any more than we can assume vegetation mapping is accurate. We know there is a lot of time-consuming refinement that needs to happen to give a true picture of what is on the ground.

I think our best contribution as a group here today is to give that view from the ground, because many of us live on properties where we share our home range with the koala's home range. Mr Chair, I wonder if I could table a map that would demonstrate this to the committee members.

**CHAIR:** There being no objection, it is so tabled.

**Ms Daly:** I have also attached our brochure, partly because it has photos of local koalas to make this more real. These are koalas on our properties. This is a map of our region. The purple shows essential habitat, the green is remnant and the pink is the proposed C category regrowth. Is that fairly clear to everyone? What I wanted to demonstrate here is that, if you look at all the red dots and the yellow dots, these are records that have been collected through a lot of community involvement and a lot of expertise on the collator's part in the last six months from a lot of sources. They are showing sightings of koalas whether alive, dead, sick, injured or rescued.

If you look at the dots, most of them fall outside essential habitat mapping and a lot are in the pink regrowth areas. If you look at an area, for example, like Widgee, you will see that the sightings are largely in a pink area. The hot spots are south of Gympie heading down the Mary Valley, again in unregulated areas. I think this map highlights that koala sightings do fall largely outside of mapped essential habitat and are largely on top of the proposed category C regrowth. My property, where I am watching for the fourth year in a row a mother koala and her joey, is not essential habitat; it is remnant. A member in Widgee who regularly sees koalas said her property is all white on the maps.

My point is that koalas make high use of regrowth, and all expertise and evidence supports what our map shows you. Regrowth often provides all-important connectivity between remnant patches, and that is vital for safe movement, dispersal of young, breeding and genetic diversity. Riparian and road corridors are also very important to koalas, especially for safe movement. We need, in our view, to regulate clearing of high-value regrowth that is shown to have biodiversity values. When we do that to protect koala habitat, we at the same time help a lot of other species.

We know a lot more needs to be done—for example, high-resolution koala habitat mapping across all LGAs to inform planning schemes. Currently, if I am not wrong, outside SEQ any meaningful mapping of koalas seems to be non-existent. I want to commend our local Gympie council, which has recently completed such a mapping exercise and is developing a koala conservation plan.

In conclusion, the status of the koala in Queensland is dire. You are probably aware of the recent press where Minister Miles suggested he would set up an expert panel after the release of the EDF Queensland report, the SEQ Koala Population Modelling Study commissioned by EHP. It was done across seven LGAs in SEQ and, not surprisingly, they are saying the decline in koala populations is rapid and the rate of the decline is increasing. They are talking about an 80 per cent loss on what they call the koala coast. For an animal already in low densities, these kinds of declines are leading to local extinctions.

I know in New South Wales recently a scientific committee has upgraded three areas from endangered to very high risk of extinction. One of the authors of that report suggested that we perhaps now need to concentrate on saving animals that still have a chance such as those in regional areas. We know that here in Gympie. That is why we have wasted no time in doing what we can here and why we are before you today to ask that in making your recommendations you consider your duty of care not to bypass any opportunity that arises that can help protect koala habitat. Without this commitment at all levels we fear the loss of koalas in the wild, and that seems unimaginable for this most iconic species.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much for that. I have a question around the number of koalas. You came up with a figure of an 80 per cent decline. If you do not have a system in place for identifying and counting koalas, how do you come up with a figure of an 80 per cent decline in recent times?

**Ms Daly:** That figure comes from a very comprehensive study that was done in the SEQ corner. It is based on a lot of studies they have done over many years. I could provide a copy or a link to that report if you like, but EHP has done a lot of counting over the years in those areas and it

commissioned University of Queensland experts to put together all that data. I believe they used a very high-quality scientific methodology to come up with that. That is based on people doing surveys and counts over the years et cetera.

**CHAIR:** On your map you said that most of the information that you have is from people telling you whether they have seen one or whether there has been one injured or dead.

**Ms Daly:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** How do you track that? Is that verbally from people or do you have an app? We have seen different apps that people use to locate different things. Do you use an app or is it just verbal?

**Ms Daly:** We do not. I know there is a national koala count later in the year that I think is initiated in New South Wales national parks and it is an app. I am not up on that technology, but I think it is a great way forward for the future to engage communities, particularly younger people. These koala records come from various sources. The consultants did a very thorough search of every record—the state WildNet database, koala tracker, Australian Koala Foundation records and the community reporting their koala sightings to the Mary River Catchment Coordinating Committee, which is then authorised to send that through to WildNet, the state database. There are a lot of different sources—and the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection because anyone who goes to a hospital must be recorded.

**Mr PERRETT:** Michelle, thank you for being here today. I am pleased that some people read the transcripts from those hearings.

**Ms Daly:** I do.

**Mr PERRETT:** I asked that particular witness whether they were aware that essential habitat mapping exists under the Nature Conservation Act and they were not. I was quite surprised about that. To go back to your testimony today in respect of your views around high-value regrowth being retained on properties, if that is something that is required to sustain koalas and that, in turn, creates problems for landowners in respect of ongoing management and lost production, in your view do you believe that if it is being retained in the so-called community good, particularly for koalas, the government has a role to compensate landholders for either any land value lost or any lost production on that property?

**Ms Daly:** I like the idea of incentives. I do not know to what extent it does impact—I am not an expert on that—but I think we are at that point. I think if we need incentives to retain koala habitat, then we need to because we have to save the koala.

**Mr PERRETT:** Certainly from some of the evidence that has been presented to this committee across the state there are significant tracts of land that are now proposed to be locked up under category C high-value regrowth that a lot of witnesses have said is going to make it very difficult for them to sustain production on their property. If in your view you support that particular component of this legislation, if that does pass the parliament and those property owners do suffer a loss, are you supportive of the state government actually providing compensation for the retention of that high-value regrowth on that land to sustain koalas?

**Ms Daly:** It is not something I have discussed with the group and I am representing the group. To me it sounds like it needs consideration for sure. On my map there is a little bit of section C that will get added in and it makes complete sense on my property. It is old pineapple fields that have regrown over probably 50 years and filling in that little bit of white makes complete sense on my property, but I do understand for many that this is a cause of concern, and I am talking particularly about high-quality regrowth that is koala habitat. That is my focus and I am sure there are a lot of areas we are talking about that are not necessarily koala habitat. In terms of how they are going to refine that and really identify the key regrowth to protect, I do not have that expertise and I imagine that that is something that you are mulling over. I certainly think incentives and compensation perhaps need to be part of the strategy.

**Mr PERRETT:** I have a follow-up question, and I think you touched on it earlier, about the essential habitat mapping being perhaps not what you would consider to be extensive enough. Given what you have said today, perhaps that might be an area where you might be able to direct further thought to that component rather than locking up what would appear to be, in this legislation, a lot of country under this high-value regrowth category C. Is that something that you would consider and perhaps you would give some more thought to—that is, how extensive the habitat mapping actually is?

**Ms Daly:** We do and that is why we make a concerted effort in our community to get records into WildNet, but that is just something we are doing here. I am very much doubting much of Queensland's records of koalas get into the state WildNet database. It is not easy. It is not something

a citizen can just put in. I do think outside SEQ essential habitat mapping is that double layer of kind of confirmed sightings, and I know that it must be verified along with suitable habitat. Yes, a lot can be done there and I think the state government need to do that and I really want them to also ask every local government to do what Gympie has now done—that is, to do that finetuning at the local level. All that will help, but I absolutely believe that we need to do something under the Vegetation Management Act about regrowth. Mr Perrett, my concern is if we miss this opportunity we have still got what we see here—koalas in regrowth areas that are getting no protection, and it is a concern in our community. We constantly hear from people who are seeing clearing of koala habitat and it is distressing for many community members.

**Mr MADDEN:** Thank you, Michelle, for coming in today and I want to thank everyone else for coming in today to discuss this very important issue. I have two quick questions. Looking at your map, can I read into this map that Tin Can Bay-Rainbow Beach is a very important area for koalas?

**Ms Daly:** No. What it is telling us is that it is essential habitat, but essential habitat is not necessarily for koalas. I am sorry; maybe I should have said that earlier. It is just essential habitat for some species, but you would have to refine it down. All we can say about essential habitat is that it will protect some koalas in some places, but this is not essential habitat for koalas. I am sorry; I should have made that clear earlier. That is obviously essential habitat—someone here might have more knowledge; I do not know if you know, Mr Perrett—but it may be plant communities. In fact because of the sandy nature of it, we were very surprised there was a koala sighting in there. They did find that, yes.

**Mr MADDEN:** Thanks very much, Michelle.

**Mr SORENSEN:** All that country that is hatched there, around Neerdie and Tin Can Bay Road, is all forestry land planted with pines, isn't it?

**Ms Daly:** Yes. That comes up as protected area estate, yes. There is some purple in parts of that—the essential habitat. Yes, all those green lines are protected areas, whether it be forestry or national parks, as I understand. You will see quite a big cluster out there around Goomborian. We are really happy about that koala population out there, but, again, it is not in essential habitat but is a significant koala population.

**Mr SORENSEN:** With regard to some of the dead koalas that you find, how many of those have been killed on the road and how many of them die from the disease that they get?

**Ms Daly:** Mr Sorensen, all those. We have some killed on the roads in Gympie. There have been a few. I in fact collected a dead one off the highway probably six months ago and was also down on the Bruce Highway and helped with the rescue of one that actually survived. I am not a rescuer, but I just happened to be the nearest person. We have had a couple hit—one out on Tin Can Bay Road a few months back and one on the Mary Valley highway that was killed. There are also domestic dogs and a lot of disease, particularly I find in the western regions where the conditions are harsher, so there are koalas suffering from dehydration, malnutrition and a lot of chlamydia. Yes, disease is significant and of course wild dogs. We cannot quantify it, but we know it is happening.

**Mr SORENSEN:** Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Michelle, for your time.

**MACKAY, Mr Ian, Chair, Mary River Catchment Coordinating Committee**

**CHAIR:** Welcome, Mr Mackay. I invite you to make a short opening statement.

**Mr Mackay:** Thank you very much for this opportunity. Perhaps I need to explain a little bit about MRCCC, because I think it is relevant to what we are considering today. It was set up as a community initiative originally but then went to Brisbane and lobbied then DPI minister Ed Casey to be one of the integrated catchment management pilots for Queensland. We are made up of a number of sectors with reps from each, so we have grazing reps, dairy, horticulture, environment, local government, state government, Waterwatch and a number of others who number about 20 something. Our aim is to maintain and protect productivity while protecting the environment, and that duality is very important.

At the formation of MRCCC one of the delegates Les Kropp, who will be familiar with many in the audience, made the quote that the number of sectors was so diverse it was the recipe for inertia and he predicted that this would be a committee that would be crippled by inertia. Some 22 years on, I am very happy to say that he was wrong. We are what John Howard would describe as a broad church—I think we are probably even broader than what John Howard envisaged as he said that—in that we work with what unites us rather than what divides us. I think that is why MRCCC has such a good acceptance in the community. To quote our deputy chair, Rob Priebe, who will be known to many, MRCCC is not only an organisation that is well known; it is known well. We have had the benefit of wise elders—people like Jim Buchanan and Graeme Elphinstone—and over the years we have worked productively with around about 1,000 landholders in schemes like Reef Rescue, Reef Trust, FarmFLOW and soon the federal government's reef gully trust program.

Since first making our submission I have read those of many others who took the time to share their views with the committee. Some passionately support the proposed legislation; others oppose it. Some offer expertise and more detailed analysis. Some aired concerns about its impact on primary producers. Several matters have arisen since we made our original submission. We have been made aware of inaccuracies in the vegetation mapping, and this is concerning. I was pleased to see the commitment that I understand was given at a departmental briefing a few days ago that obvious errors would be rectified at no expense to the landholders, and this is as it should be and is absolutely essential. It might sound facetious, but I do hope that there are sufficient on-the-ground staff to do this given that we had a fairly significant involuntary reduction in Public Service numbers a couple of years back. That is facetious, but it is essential—very essential—to this. I noticed that it was previously the Water Act that regulated activities in the riparian area, with trained staffed very familiar with river processes carrying out inspections. Now that riparian areas would come under the Vegetation Management Act, I just hope that inspecting staff will have the necessary experience and expertise in the field of river processes. It is very important.

At our executive meeting this morning we had some more discussion about this and there was discussion about the width of riparian buffers. We would caution against adopting a one-size-fits-all model, a figure of 50 metres in this case, although I notice from the transcript, Mr Perrett, that there was discussion of 200 metres somewhere further north. We do believe that buffer widths should be related to stream order magnitudes. These are well mapped. It seems inconsistent really, or it seems unwise to consider the width of a buffer needed for, say, the Mary River in a very wide section to be the same as that for a fairly small creek, even though it may be a watercourse. I do think that is very important.

Further to this, we have a problem in this area of two invasive weeds called cat's claw creeper and madeira vine that are very prominent in riparian areas. I think it may well be preferable to have a narrow, well-maintained buffer than to have a wider one that is infested with these weeds. As a landholder who is dealing with both of these in riparian sections, I think there is a lot of truth in that.

On a rather different note, several days ago a New South Wales jury—I am sure you are aware of this—handed down a guilty verdict over the murder of an environment officer by a prominent landholder, and this only strengthened my resolve to stress on this interparty committee the need to work together to produce good legislation and to please stop using it as a political football. We do not have changes in road rules when the government changes. We do not have changes in educational policy, and it does not seem unreasonable to ask for vegetation management legislation that landholders can become familiar with and also that the wider community has confidence in. I am heartened by an interparty committee working on this, and I notice the punishing schedule on your listening tour and I thank you all for your dedication.

I am saddened when I read articles and hear things like 'extreme greens' and some of the very emotive language. I beg almost that we get away from that and try to find out a good pathway for producing some good legislation. I just cannot help feeling that words like those I have just mentioned

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have the effect of elevating anger and certainly anxiety and polarisation. This is not an 'us and them'. It must not be an 'us and them' situation, and my experience with MRCCC only strengthens my resolve in that area.

I return to the model of MRCCC. Despite Les Kropp's gloomy prognostications over 20 years back, we have concentrated on what unites us rather than has the potential to divide us. We have worked with hundreds of landholders to improve their productivity while achieving good environmental outcomes at the same time—absolute win-wins.

I want to conclude with a quote from Rob Priebe, our deputy chairman. Rob and I are from very different backgrounds, including politically I dare say, but I have really valued our good working relationship and mutual respect that has developed during our involvement with MRCCC. Our executive meeting this morning strongly endorsed my feeling that we need stable legislation with which landholders can become familiar, legislation that has wide community confidence, and we need to explore in future the ways that landholders' retention of high-conservation vegetation means they can receive some form of financial recompense. Mr Perrett, I did mean to say at the very start of things that if you would like to ask me the question you asked Michelle I would be happy to receive it because we discussed it this morning. To quote Rob Priebe by way of finishing, 'Governments may come and governments may go, but our environment does go on forever.' Thank you very much and I would welcome questions.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Mackay. That was a good opening statement. On the riparian zone, you say that the 50 metres that is suggested probably does not fit all. We have to make some recommendations from this committee, if possible. What would your suggestion be for a model that we could recommend?

**Mr Mackay:** I certainly would not like to give a figure recommendation. Just knowing a little bit about how rivers work and fluvial geomorphology, there are sections of a river where it is, for example, hard up against a bedrock control, a rock wall almost. The river is well protected and there will not be any eroding of that. There are other sections that are quite vulnerable. I do suggest, if one wants to do figures, there might be some sort of scale that is related to the order of stream magnitude—that smaller streams have a smaller buffer—but there really is a need for on-the-ground officers to be doing some assessment as well. If it is an area that is of a soil type that is obviously erodible and is eroding, I can see a case for going a bit wider. If it is an area where there is good existing riparian vegetation, it could perhaps be narrower than that. I do not like to give a hard and fast figure but I do think there needs to be some sort of flexibility in that. Essential in that is inspection by officers who understand river processes.

**Mr PERRETT:** Thank you, Ian, for being here today. There are a couple of different angles I want to explore. The first one is along that line. The current legislation is arbitrary. There is no suggestion in that legislation that there be anything other than 50 metres either side—so 100 metres in total. I did have a note here and I was going to mention the cat's claw creeper because, as you know and I know as the local member, there are some great challenges in and around that destroying riparian vegetation. We have seen some examples on our trip, particularly in the north, where there has been a thickening of that vegetation along those corridors, no grass underneath, and we have seen very vivid examples of where there is erosion—while there are trees, there is no ground cover because of the covering. I take that point. It is probably more of a statement but I was going to ask that specific question.

On another issue, I note in your submission you mention the SLATS report, which is the Statewide Landcover and Trees Study. I will read what you say for the benefit of those who are here. You state—

The figures produced in the SLATS report are indeed alarming and underscore the need for the reinstatement of a more responsible vegetation management framework in Queensland.

I assume you are referring to the 2013-14 figures which give a total of 296,000 hectares in the state that have been cleared. I want to drill down a bit more.

**Mr Mackay:** I do not have my head around the figures at the moment. I had them there.

**Mr PERRETT:** I have them here. I want to drill down a bit more and get your response to this. It is very easy to look at that overall figure which is bandied around in the media, but it is a bit more interesting when you look at it. Of that 296,000 hectares, 193,000 hectares was regrowth vegetation of category X white country and PMAV country. That is locked in. That is unaffected apparently, if you read the explanatory notes of this legislation. That is 193,000 of regrowth on locked-in country. Of the 103,000 hectares of remnant vegetation that was left, there was: 58,000 hectares for fodder under

the various fodder codes, so the mulga country; 23,000 hectares for multipermit purposes, so fodder, thinning and encroachment; 7,200 hectares for native forest practice; 4,000 hectares for fence, firebreak, road and infrastructure—

**CHAIR:** Are you going to ask a question?

**Mr PERRETT:** I am but it is important that I state these figures. There was 4,000 hectares for encroachment, 2,000 hectares for grazing lease regrowth, 2,000 hectares for thinning, and 1,000 hectares for other. Given that you in there—

**Mr Mackay:** I readily confess that I did not drill down to that extent. I saw figures that were concerning. I saw things on the ground that concerned me and I thought that was a reasonable reason to suggest that there be some changes. There is widespread feeling that the legislation of the previous government turned things back too far.

**Mr PERRETT:** I was just getting to the question. I needed to state those figures so I was clear and there was no ambiguity around it because, as you clearly say, no-one tends to drill down. They tend to use this arbitrary figure and not understand what the figures are within it. Given the way I have explained that, perhaps your statement in there about that underpinning the need for these regulatory changes is something that may require further consideration?

**Mr Mackay:** I cannot see my mind changing a lot. I would be interested to go further into the figures, and I perhaps should have done that. I think it was fairly plain that the sweeping changes that came in several years ago were not beneficial. That is an opinion, just as I note that your article in the *Gympie Times* a couple of days ago had many opinions.

**Mr PERRETT:** That is correct and that has been reflected in what I have been receiving through my office. That is why I just ask that question. It is not a trick question but I just notice that is referenced in your report and that is why I was keen to get your response around that

**Mr Mackay:** I was struck by the figure and I did not drill down into them, that is true.

**Mr PERRETT:** That is why I was keen to get your response in and around that to make certain that we were dealing with accuracies.

**CHAIR:** We are not going to debate it. You have answered the question.

**Mr Mackay:** If I may turn the table, in relation to that question you asked Michelle in terms of recompense or compensation or whatever, is it out of place if I asked whether Mr Perrett wanted to ask that again?

**Mr PERRETT:** I am happy to put that because many witnesses who have come before this committee have asked about that: 'If we are supposedly locking up country in the community good and benefit and we are going to suffer a financial loss, should the state not then recompense us for that particular loss?'

**Mr Mackay:** I have long felt that if that indeed is the case—that if farmers have good conservation value land—I do not see any reason that it should not be part of their income stream. They are actually looking after that land for the benefit of the wider community, if you like. I would not see it as a compensation like a one-off thing. I would see it as almost like an annual payment. In fact on the weekend I was visiting the Sunshine Coast council's Land for Wildlife, where they have voluntary conservation agreements and the council pays the landholder not a rate rebate but a certain amount each year based on the size of the land to do management of that remnant. I think there is some merit in that.

I am heartened also by the response about the cheap milk at the moment. This is why I hate the 'us versus them'. The general community is very supportive of farmers. Environment levies have come in all through many, many councils across the state to do good environmental work, and I do not see why that cannot be somehow investigated at state level.

**Mrs GILBERT:** You did say that there needs to be good riparian vegetation. As we have been travelling up north and then down here, we have heard varying opinions on what makes up good riparian vegetation. Could you tell us quickly what you believe is a good mix of good riparian vegetation?

**Mr Mackay:** It is a good question because I also read the comments I think from Townsville talking about the 200 metres and the need for grass to stop erosion. The grass we find along the Mary that is very, very important for erosion is a thing called lomandra, or mat-rush as it is sometimes called. Trees can be very, very close together. In fact there may be either leaf litter or even bare soil. The sort of erosion that is occurring there is not so much surface erosion, from my experience. After floods, we will often find sand deposits and silt deposits and the original surface is still there. The

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thing that worries us mostly is slumping. What stops that is not a thin line of trees, as is often the case, but quite a wide band of trees whose roots mat in together. Many of them have undercuts to a metre or a metre and a half, which is important for giant barred frog, but I will not go into that at the moment. A good mix of tree species and *Lomandra longifolia* and *Lomandra hystrix* are very important characteristics there. Is that answer sufficient, without going into a lot of other plant types?

**Mrs GILBERT:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much for your comments and your answers to the committee's questions. We have run over time.

### **NAGGS, Mr Ivan, Private capacity**

**CHAIR:** Welcome. Would you like to make an opening statement?

**Mr Naggs:** I wear many hats. I am the AgForce South-East Queensland elected state councillor. I am also the past president of the Gympie District Beef liaison group, plus many other things. I am foremost a farmer and a businessman. My wife and I run a Brahman stud and commercial operation east of Gympie in a high rainfall area. We have droughts too of course, but generally speaking we get that 1,500 mm of rainfall. As a farmer and as a business operator, I am totally opposed to any retrospective legislation. Under this legislation, we farmers are guilty until we can prove our innocence. Criminals have more rights than us as landholders, and I want that firmly entrenched because many of the farmers who I talk to have brought this up with me.

I want to talk about what I believe will happen in this Gympie region in the high rainfall areas if we are not allowed to monitor and manage our regrowth. I have seen firsthand—and I have been up here 12 years—that if we have three above-average wet seasons, especially in our district, we can have abundance of vegetation, woody weeds and regrowth which can result in pasture and restricts livestock production. We are talking about land here of anything from \$5,000 to \$7,000 affecting a whole broadacre, macadamias, small crop vegetation and people like me, specialist cattle breeders.

We have to keep this in mind. This country is valuable. We have to manage our vegetation and we do it quite successfully. Otherwise as farmers if we do not look after our land and our pastures we pay the price in lost production and lost income and then the land gets degraded. As I said, if farmers have spare dollars that they can make out of their land, most of them reinvest it in the farm. There is ample talk about that. I talk to many farmers—cattle, dairy, mixed crop, plus grazing for alternative incomes. In this district many of our holdings are between 40 acres to 100, 150 or 200 acres. In some studies that have been done by councils, 60 per cent of the small landholders here have off-farm income. It is that livestock and crops that they do in their spare time, on weekends or with their families that make up their income.

I have done a little assessment here of what could go on. On a small property out there, well-pastured, good crops, if a farmer had 40 to 50 acres, in a good season he could run 20 cows and calves off that. That would give him that extra income to keep the maintenance up of the farm, look after his livestock and have a little bit of cash to reinvest. If we have to go with this 50-metre barrier—and I agree with the other speaker—that would be 100 metres and some of these farmers would have to cut right back and they could lose a quarter of their income. Flexibility here has to be the order of the day.

Of the people I have spoken to in the district, about half of them are unaware of any proposed amendments to the current Vegetation Management Act. I would say the vast majority I have spoken to do not have a PMAV for their property. There is a lot of education to go on here.

I want to cover what I believe some of the lost income would be on those farmers. This goes back into the community; it goes back into the people who carry out weed control. We have a major weed problem here in this district called giant rat's tail, just to name one. It is eroding a lot of farmers' incomes. If we take away that land from them, I can see a massive explosion in GRT.

The other one I want to count is flooding of creeks. In our own case we have Tinana Creek, which flows through the corner of our property. On one side of it we own about eight to 10 acres. It was cleared and well grassed and it is upstream before we bought the property. The other bank is heavily timbered. In August 2007, we had 720 millimetres of rain in four days. The grass side of the banks were the same after the flood event, but on the tree side we lost up to five metres with huge gum trees—you name it—oak trees and everything. That creek today when it goes down towards the end of a drought is just full of trees and rubble. I firmly believe if you have good grassed areas of banks you will do better than with all these trees. I really feel that.

On today's events, I believe that that 25 to 50 metres has to be negotiable. If you look at the map that I have of our property—we have a PMAV from way back—little streams only flow with water after a 100-mil storm. That is the only time that you would ever see it run, but we have to have 25 to 50 metres either side of that. I do not want people crawling all over my place. I think farmers are best equipped to know how to manage their farms.

I will give you an example of what I fear is going on. My wife and I recently walked away from buying a parcel of land with the idea of expanding our Brahman stud and commercial cattle operation. This farm was an estate after the death of the last owner. I had been negotiating with the family for some two years. He had been very sick and we were asked if we were interested in it. It did not have a PMAV and was heavily overgrown with woody weeds, regrowth and clearing 20-odd years ago. We

were prepared to spend up to \$250,000 on top of the purchase price to improve this property. That would give local fencing contractors work, because we are not young; local steel merchants, cattle yards, stock and handling equipment; rural merchandise—we would buy pasture seed, fertiliser, herbicides. That would keep local people in this district employed and not on the dole. We walked away from that property because, at my age, I said, 'No. I can invest that money better.' I believe that property now has lost its value completely. If this legislation goes through, I do not think you will see too many people walk in with an open chequebook.

I believe that this area is a future food bowl because of food miles—that is, transportation of food to the closest markets. This area is one of those. We do not, as farmers, want any impediments that can stop our production, because our costs keep rising. We have to get better productivity and we do not want to have that cost on us to reduce. We have had now 18 changes and 38 amendments to the vegetation act since 1999. As farmers, we seem to be at the end of the food chain, I would say, as far as this political football goes. It has to end, because we are not tree vandals; we manage our environment very, very well. Otherwise it would take us out financially.

Finally, I believe that the Mary catchment should be taken out of the proposed category R, because I think we are doing a pretty good job. There are also very good programs to have farmers adopt best management practices, for example grazing best management. Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much. That was very thorough. You made a comment about the riverbank sides when you have seen a flood come through. We have heard that on quite a few occasions during this process. Can you explain to me what you have seen in other areas with really thick trees on the riverbank? We have been told by departments that the way to go is to have good solid tree structure and other material around it. We have also heard, on the other side, just have trees and no grass but still being allowed to thin. Do you think it should be a bit of both in the riparian zones or should it be mainly grass and just a few trees?

**Mr Naggs:** From what I have seen of where big trees are—and I have been up here for only 12 years, but I have done a lot of travelling in the rural industry from my previous background. I have seen where you have a heavy infestation. We owned a property in Central Queensland on the Dawson River. We have seen that in big floods, where you have big gum trees and other trees that grow by the creeks, they have just gone down. On the other side of a property we had in CQ we were fenced. We had grasses right up to the creek. On that boundary we did not have anywhere near the problem. We would lose 15 to 20 metres, sometimes. Those banks just come down and create more erosion then and you do not have stability in that bank again. Even out at home here we have fenced that side off completely. No livestock ever got into it anyway, because we had alternative waters, but we fenced it off. Ten metres back from that we put in she-oaks in and lomandras, too.

**CHAIR:** I have an inquiry about the amount of PMAVs that have been locked in and other maps that people are trying to get. Just about every landholder we have heard from across these hearings has concerns about the accuracy of PMAVs. From your role in the AgForce sector, can you tell the committee about any concerns that you have heard from members?

**Mr Naggs:** I can. A fellow up the road from me rang me. He was very concerned, because his mapping showed that his house was in the 50-metre branch. It is a house and trees that he put in there 12 years ago—very accurate.

**CHAIR:** And there are many others, obviously, by the sounds of that?

**Mr Naggs:** Yes.

**Mr SORENSEN:** Do you believe that the department should send out PMAVs to everyone to check before the legislation goes through?

**Mr Naggs:** Too right I do. I totally agree with that. A lot of people out there are not even aware of this. These are people with 40 or 50 acres who work through the week and work on their farms at the weekend. I believe there has to be a big education course to let them know. We are putting legislation on to farmers and they do not even understand it.

**Mr SORENSEN:** With some of the codes and everything that goes through the planning and so on, do you think most people understand that?

**Mr Naggs:** I would say probably those who are interested would be 25 per cent—this is how I find it in discussion—the other 25 per cent want to know about it and the other half think it will go away.

**Mr MADDEN:** I am interested in what you had to say about PMAVs being inaccurate. We have had witnesses come forward, talking about the difficulty in the self-assessment process. We even had an agricultural scientist who said it was too difficult for him. Do you have any comment about the difficulty of self-assessment?

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**Mr Naggs:** Personally, I have not had to do a self-assessment. I know one of our AgForce members who is going through it. He is probably unique, because he has that many colours of the rainbow. I do not think the department staff understand it either, just quietly.

**CHAIR:** Thank you for your time and for answering our questions. I now call on the Gympie Beef Liaison Group.

**VINER, Mr Jim, President, Gympie Beef Liaison Group**

**CHAIR:** Welcome, Jim.

**Mr Viner:** Thank you for the invitation to come along this afternoon. I have no formal written presentation, so I will go off the cuff and see how we go. I have been the president of the Beef Liaison Group for approximately five of the past 10 years. The Beef Liaison Group has 260 members across South-East Queensland. The majority are beef producers, but others are just landowners or hobby farmers, you could say. We spend a lot of time educating farmers and hobby farmers in best practice with beef production, land production, pasture management and working with the MRCCC with the reef rescue packages, gully erosion packages and so on. We push best practice. To have something like the new vegetation laws thrust upon us is a bit of an insult to what we have been trying to achieve, trying to say that we are not doing a good job of it.

Foremost, I am also a beef producer, just to the west of Gympie. We did a PMAV in 2007. I was a bit shocked last week when someone said, 'You haven't got a PMAV.' I went straightaway and pulled out my PMAV and found that of our 13 titles, somewhere along the line one title had been missed. We have a little block of 16 hectares in the middle of our land now that has 11 hectares under categories R and C. I have been growing pasture, oats and all sorts of things on it and now I am told I cannot do any of that.

Last year, we decided on our property to do a bit of development. The cattle industry certainly has not been good for quite a while, so we looked at diversifying. We went to DNR to get some information about putting in high-value farming practices. We found we had some good country where we could do this. We have managed to put in 37 hectares of country for growing high-class grass seed. We did aim to improve or increase that production area. Unfortunately, this block of land now blocks that. It would have been part of our development in the future.

A question I have is, and someone has already raised it, that you have someone who for the past 10 or 15 years has wanted to be—I am not going to say an environmental person, but does not care what their land does in regrowth and so on. Suddenly, that land comes up for a change of ownership. In this part of the world you get a lot of change of ownership, compared to further west and so on. Suddenly, the new people who want to buy that land cannot do anything with it because it has been put under these laws. That land is basically lost to any future production.

People have talked about the category R watercourses and 50 metres. There are already these classifications with the water systems and so on. I question that you have a rating 1 stream, but is it a stream? I have neighbours who have rating 1 streams but it is a 50-metre-wide flat. The water runs across it once every four or five years, yet it is category 1 now. It is a category 1 stream, but it has a 50-metre buffer either side of it. There is no actual definition to that stream. It is a big, wide flat. Where does the 50 metres start and stop? Who is going to come out and measure that? What is the angst that that landowner has until someone can tell him what he can do? Also, that land cannot be used for any future high-production value. When you look at Gympie and the amount of country that comes up as pink, there is not a lot left. All that country that comes up as category R is the most productive country in the Mary Valley, yet we cannot do anything with it if this goes through.

The classification of the category C regrowth, looking at the veg maps for around Gympie, you see a lot of country that I know is just lantana, wattle or camphor laurel. Now that is all being classified as high-value regrowth. How are these things going to be changed? How much money is going to be spent changing these things? What of the time involved and the lost production in the meantime? With these plants—the wattle, the camphor laurel and the lantana—for the past five or six years the landowners and beef producers have been having a very hard time. Therefore, not a lot of money has been put into controlling that regrowth. Then you get a couple of wet seasons thrown in on top of it, so you cannot do anything anyway. Then you get a dry season where you are too busy trying to look after your cattle and keep everything else going. Then the government comes out and puts a stop on anything you can do anyway. Just when you get some money and the time available to do it, you are not allowed to do it, so that land is lost to production, as well.

Basically, there has to be some control over vegetation control and so on. I think this is just going too far. As a lot of people have said, this football has been passed around, backwards and forwards, a fair bit while the landowners are the ones who have to cop the brunt of it all. Thank you.

**CHAIR:** You mentioned earlier in your statement about the education of farmers and that part of your role as president of the Gympie District Beef Liaison Group is giving information to landholders. Is the information not coming from the department through to individual landholders and

landholders are relying on groups like yours to get that message out? Where is the missing link? If we have to make any recommendation on education and communication to landholders, what is the missing link and is the department getting that information out or is it very lackadaisical?

**Mr Viner:** Twenty years ago there was a thing called the DPI and there were a lot of DPI staff on the ground and they were out educating people with production in pastures and so on. Gympie had a very big DPI presence. They had a big office. There is no-one in the DPI in Gympie now. Our nearest DPI representative is either Kingaroy or Toowoomba. There are no government people there to do it. Ian Mackay spoke about Graeme Elphinstone. He was in the DPI. He is one of the highest regarded people in pasture management. He retired a couple of years ago but no-one has replaced him. The beef liaison group, as does the MRCCC, rely on Graeme as a private consultant to help us educate people. There are just no department people there to help educate landowners.

**CHAIR:** With issues like PMAVs, who do you see around this area for that? Is the department open to help around here or is there no-one here to do that for you as well?

**Mr Viner:** I do not think there is anyone in the department who comes out and helps you do a PMAV. The MRCCC have been helping a lot of people with PMAVs, and the beef liaison group were when PMAVs were coming in in 2007. We used to help. We had information nights and so on to help people do it, but there is no-one to come out on the ground that I know of.

**Mr PERRETT:** Thank you, Jim, for coming along here today. I just want to touch on the management of these lands that are going to be locked up in either category R or category C high-value regrowth. There is an acute problem around here in relation to weeds. We know about giant rat's tail grass, and I think Mr Naggs touched on that before, but you also touched on lantana and other environmental weeds, particularly class 2 weeds under the Biosecurity Act, that landowners have an onus to control but there is no production coming out of that land anymore because it is locked up. Do you see that there will be any incentive for landowners to take an active role in managing those class 2 but also environmental weeds including cat's claw creeper and others?

**Mr Viner:** It is certainly going to make it very hard to manage those weeds in this country. I have access to a forestry lease and it has rat's tail in it. Half of that forestry lease got transferred over to national parks about five years ago. Now I put up with a policy where we used to burn it every two or three years so you could continually have access into it because it was always open and so on. We have not had a fire in that block now for 10 years because National Parks will not let you burn after 1 September. It could be dry as a bone and you are not allowed to burn because there is a fire ban before 1 September. On 2 September it could rain a bit but you are not allowed to burn it. That country is now overgrown with wattle and lantana and it is very hard to gain access to any of that country to control any weed. I am manager of that land so I still have to control it. The cost is put on me. That is going to happen in freehold country where it is more and more expensive for a landowner to control these weeds and they are coming up against more and more hurdles to do it.

**Mr MADDEN:** I have a question ask you with regard to the possibility that this bill may not get through parliament and we would be left with the existing legislation. Are you okay with the existing legislation?

**Mr Viner:** The existing legislation is very easy to work with, I think. Certainly there are places further afield in Queensland where I think it might be hard to deal with, but at least we know where we stand and there is a process to go through and get things approved. I think this bill is going to make it very hard to try to do anything.

**Mr SORENSEN:** With the 50-metre boundaries on creek banks, when I was in the MRCCC many years ago there was a lot of work done on cat's claw and trying to get rid of it in the river system. Do you think farmers will do much work on that if they are more or less locked out of those areas? The other question I would like you to answer is: when you have groundsel bush on your property in creeks and the council tells you to go and destroy it, you are in a difficult situation if you went in there with a tractor and bulldozed it down and bulldozed a few other trees over. That is where I find a lot of concern for farmers out there.

**Mr Viner:** That is very true. There are some weeds where the only way is to do something mechanically about it. If a landowner is going to be hesitant doing that, if he is scared that he might knock off a remnant tree and suddenly he is going to have someone knocking on his door and saying he is guilty, you are not going to go in and do that job, are you? Also if that country is taken out of production and you are earning less money off your property there is going to be less money to put in to control these weeds.

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**CHAIR:** Thank you for your time. It is much appreciated. We will now move to the open forum part of the evening. Thank you to those people who have filled out witness forms. I will be inviting people to come up to the front table to speak to the committee one at a time. I would ask that you keep your comments short and to the point. We have 20 speakers and we have an hour to do it in. If I can ask you to spend five minutes maximum. I will have a timer on just to make sure that we keep to the time, if we can, so that everyone here tonight gets a chance to have their say.

**MACAULAY, Mr Cam, Private capacity**

**Mr Macaulay:** I am a co-owner of a block of land at what used to be Upper Wonga and is now Widgee. I am a farmer and I would like to, if it is allowable, hand to the members of the committee some maps I have got from DNRM in respect of my block of land. I think it graphically shows what this legislation does to the land.

**CHAIR:** Leave is granted.

**Mr Macaulay:** The first map on the front page is what the categorisation was prior to 17 March 2016. It is the block of land with an X in it. If you flick over the page, that is what it is after 16 March 2016. On the best estimate that I can do, using the 50-metre barrier which I understand is both sides, including all the dry gullies which might flow once a year if we get enough rain—the bulk of the time they do not run at all—they are currently treed to some extent because as a management practice we have left gum trees, ironbarks and similar nature trees in gullies where erosion might occur, not from flooding but from dry land erosion which falls around the dry season. The country is all in old-area country. It is pastured with a mix of natural grasses, blue grasses, paspalum, cassia and some siratro. If you look at the second map and you do the calculation, approximately 44 per cent of the property will become zone R.

Little or no water goes down the bulk of those gullies. The one with the blue block: that is the actual creek. That actually has water in it. The rest of it is dry gullies. They are 20 to 30 yards wide and between zero and five or six metres deep. In 67 years I have never seen those gullies reach their banks. If we are to lose 100 metres down all that country there, we are actually going to lose 100 metres either side of those dry gullies in our very best land. This is the land that makes your creek flats, your gully flats, where all your best grasses grow, and towards the front of the property where the road is all creek flats will disappear—every last part of it. Gone the weaner paddock, gone the dry cow paddock, gone the possibility of rotation. Gone!

Economically it will destroy the value of that block, but on top of that, apart from the loss my brother and I will sustain if we leave it the way it is, everybody we trade with—carrier, vet, produce merchant, you name it—will see their income go down accordingly. Our ability to manage the property will diminish with the returns. Some of the previous speakers have cut across some of the things I wanted to say with regard to the 50-metre barrier. Where creeks run, or in this case gullies run, irregularly and infrequently, surely that 50-metre barrier is far too wide. Tree coverage on creek banks, gully banks et cetera in my opinion should reflect the nature of the soil in which the tree is grown. A sandy loam riverbank on the Mary River is different to a clay gully on a rural property. This is a dry land area. Our rainfall is very limited.

With regard to the possibility of compensation—and in all fairness, in this nation of ours it should not be a possibility; it should be an absolute—I would recommend that such compensation would not be a one-off payment to a landowner but should be an annual payment based on the loss of income sustained through the loss of this country. It should not be a levy on the local ratepayer but should be on the whole of the state because climate change does not just affect Gympie; it affects the whole of the country so we all should contribute by way of a payment back to the farmer or farmers if they are to lose this production. I have many other comments, but I think with the time limitations I will leave it at that. Thank you.

**EDWARDS, Mr Greg, Private capacity**

**Mr Edwards:** I am a farmer at Bells Bridge. I was a dairy farmer for 35 years. I am born and bred on the Mary River. I have seen many floods. I am starting to wonder if some people here have ever seen a flood. Trees are washed out in a flood because water eddies around those trees. That creates a swirling effect around that tree. That is why that tree washes out. When that tree goes out, a lot of dirt goes out with it. I hope that explains that question. That is why in a lot of cases grass is better than trees.

About this mapping I am totally ignorant. I have never seen or heard of it. I will be very ignorant if somebody came onto my property, my freehold property, and tried to tell me how to manage it—somebody who would not have a clue because they have never seen the property and do not know the first thing about it yet they can tell me how to manage it.

Finally, there is much anticipation around here about a highway to bypass Gympie. I would like to see how many restricted areas that goes through. They are going to be cleared regardless. A highway is more important than a farmer; that is very obvious. Thanks very much.

**OVENS, Mr James, Private capacity**

**Mr Ovens:** I am a property owner on the south side of Gympie. With this new legislation, regarding the accuracy of these maps, we have a river or a stream marked on the top of a hill. There is never any water on the top of a hill. You have also got a green area, or a remnant area, underneath a powerline for Powerlink. These maps are thoroughly irresponsible and irregular.

As for the regrowth and the planting of trees and everything else and having this area around the rivers, I did over 12 months on a work-for-the-dole scheme working for Landcare and the government where they ripped out all the vegetation and the trees along the Mary River up to Kidd Bridge. I told them that removing those trees and all that other was going to be detrimental. If this committee was here during the day I would take them down by the Kidd Bridge and show the landslip caused by a government funded demolishing of a perfectly working environment on the trees and the vegetation around it. The way this has all been set up is affecting farmers, it is affecting the man in town and it is affecting everybody else, whether they know it or not. It has to be looked into properly, not this knee-jerk reaction by the greens. That is all I have to say at the moment, thanks.

**CHAIR:** Before I call up the next speaker, it was remiss of me not to acknowledge Mick Curran, the mayor for Gympie, and Councillor Cochrane.

**BUCKLEY, Mr John, Private capacity**

**Mr Buckley:** My wife and I own 80 acres of land on the south side of Gympie. This land when we bought it did not have anything. There were no trees or laws on it whatsoever. We bought this land for a housing development which backs onto an existing housing development. We now have 95 per cent cover with the vegetation laws. That coverage is of different colours. This means to me I have been told to grow trees. To a developer rat's tail grass is not a problem, but I will not be spraying rat's tail grass from now on as I have to cut costs. When you buy a block of land for a housing development and you end up with five per cent left, you have to be very good with the mathematics to make it pay, so the best thing I can do for a start is to cut all costs. There will be no more rat's tail spraying in case I spray bushes, and I definitely know I will not be able to pay the fines. To lock up the waterways, that is the quickest way to spread rat's tail grass over long distances. That is about it for rat's tail grass.

Landholders need more firebreaks than just boundaries and, as I just told you, I have five per cent left so the only place I can put firebreaks is on the boundaries. Landowners are responsible. They do not burn the whole lot of the land in one go, especially in the town area, because if you have four sides to watch you have houses on four sides and someone is going to complain. Some of my neighbours have not burned for 20 years. They are not game to burn because of the houses and the trouble it starts. When I light a fire there are fire engines coming from every direction and I think there is a party on, but I am a bit busy. We are to have 20-odd houses built just outside our eastern boundary so if a fire was to start on our western boundary with a westerly wind blowing, maybe homes would be burned and lives lost.

Of course this would create employment—GST for the government—and as in Victoria and Western Australia, with everyone paying a little more on their insurance it certainly helps with the employment. That is about all. In Brisbane to help the environment two or three times a year there are tonnes of fireworks let off over the Brisbane River straight into the water right under the nose of the police. It tastes toxic and smells toxic, so it probably is toxic. In you are fair dinkum this should not happen again. Fireworks yes, but on land a good distance from waterways so it can be filtered out. Thank you for your time.

**THOMPSON, Mr Owen, Private capacity**

**Mr Thompson:** Thank you to the committee for this opportunity. I live on a cattle property between here and Maryborough in a district called Mount Urah. Like many people in this part of the world, the only way I can make ends meet is by having more than one income stream. I am probably fortunate too. I have got to the point in life where I can survive within the confines of my property now. My multiple income stream comes from beef cattle and natural native hardwood timbers. This part of the world, the Wide Bay-Burnett area, has the best hardwood in the world. It is a key part of industry and survival for most of the commercial cattle producers within this part of the world. The timber industry is a normal part of their business. The hardwoods in this part of the world, particularly the spotted gum, have the highest tensile strength of any hardwood in the world, and it is the only place in the world where that quality hardwood will self-regenerate from a seedling to commercial maturity in less than the human life span. It does not happen anywhere else in the world. Other people in the world come and get our product and take it away.

One of the issues that has come to light over the last 16 years, particularly with this multiple income stream issue, is the lack of confidence for people to invest in the future and continue to operate their timber resources in a sustainable manner. They have absolutely no confidence whatever in government processes anymore and that is a sad, sad day. There is around about 1.7 million hectares of forested map remnant area in the south-east bioregion. Around about 900,000 hectares or so of that is probably available for some form of commercial timber production. There is about 500,000-odd category X non-remnant within the area, much of which produces a large amount of timber.

My particular property has been fairly well recorded. It is not very hard to find references to me and my history. The hardwood timber industry produces around about 300,000 cubic metres per annum, 45,000 of which comes from the state resources in the south-east regional forest agreement area, and by the present government policy this is to cease in another eight years. It needs to be taken up after that point by a private resource. Out of that 500,000-odd hectares of category X, you lump that in with the available map remnant areas that can produce timber. If it was managed and people had the actual confidence that their future was secured to go ahead and do that, measurements and recordings over many years through what was the state department of forestry and what little remains of DPI forestry, and more latterly through private resources, the production of one cubic metre per hectare per annum is easily achievable. I do not think I need to explain when you do the mathematics on that potential production that has been thrown away.

This timber is used within our industry. We are sitting here on a floor that is made of some of the finest timber in the world. If this product is not produced here it is brought in from overseas. The demand is there for timber as a building product. It is going to be brought in from overseas from places which are nowhere near as well regulated or as responsible as what this country holds itself to be, and I think that is a sad indictment on governments over a long, long period of time. People do not have confidence in their government to act responsibly in the management of a resource for their long-term future. Why doesn't it happen? There are probably many and varied reasons. One is very poor planning. There is lack of incentive, but mostly it is the severe mistrust of government.

There has been very little in the political arena in the past 16 years to improve confidence, and vegetation and environment is not static. It is an analogue thing; it moves around. One of the best ways for this change will be the need for recognition by governments of the value of this industry and thus an active input into securing its future by supporting and giving incentive and education, which will always achieve much more than waving a big stick around. If it means that there is compensation to pay, if the community via the government of the day demands that this is so, then it is up to the whole of the community to put its hand in its collective pocket and pay the bill. Thank you very much for your time.

**CLIFFORD, Mr Peter, Private capacity**

**Mr Clifford:** Thank you, Mr Chairman, for the opportunity to address the panel. My major concern about many other things with the legislation is fire control. It has already been mentioned. We live on the western side of Gympie. On one boundary there are thousands of acres of forestry that has not had a regime of regular burning. On our property there is remnant vegetation. We undertake a regime of making sure we have firebreaks. We have dozers in there all the time. On our other boundaries there is a lot of close settlement of people on two- and five-acre blocks. Our concern with this is because of what we have been through.

We lived in Canberra and, as you may remember, Canberra was almost devastated by a firestorm that started in the Brindabellas and raced through. As far as our experience was concerned, the street signs were melted. Fire prevention officers lost their lives and our home was burned to the ground. We do not want to see that again and we certainly do not want to see it in Gympie. Our argument is that, in order to ensure that we can maintain the process of limiting any effects of fire, we will be able to reduce hazard. We can reduce fuel loads and we can do that, as we do now, off our own bat. We do not have to get approvals, we do not have to get permission and when we see the need for it, we do it. Our concern is that, in the experience of the ACT and the New South Wales government, they tended to fail to do this and the process of getting approval was so onerous that people did not bother, and we saw the net result of that. That is our major concern.

The other point we would make is that we hope that, by coming along as I have today and by speaking about this thing, it has registered—that it is not just an empty gesture and that whatever we have to say will be taken into account. We do not want to see that circumstance ever again, and we do not want to see legislation enacted that has dreadful consequences. Thank you.

**CLIFFORD, Mrs Christine, Private capacity**

**Mrs Clifford:** Thank you for hearing our concerns. With regard to this particular legislation, when I first saw it I thought, 'Who are the victims in this legislation?' Clearly, the victims are farmers. From reading all the newspapers and so on you can see that Australian farmers are highly regarded all around the world. They are the most efficient and one of the most productive groups of people not only in Australia but also worldwide. Not only are they very efficient; they are grossly overregulated already.

I look at this and I think, 'Why are we trying to regulate them further?' If you look at most of the farmers in this room, I could guarantee that they would have one room in their house which is full of paperwork right to the ceiling. If they are dairy farmers, they will probably have two rooms full of paperwork right to the ceiling. I look at the legislation and I say, if it is not intended to cause more regulation for farmers—which they really want!— what is it intended to do? What is the purpose of this legislation?

I could think of three possible reasons, but I am sure you could add to them. The first is I thought it is going to protect our native animals. I cannot see how it is going to do that. The second one is it is going to protect our forests, but I cannot see how it is going to do that either. The third is I thought it will cause emissions reduction. On the first point, if it protects our native animals, there are practices that have been carried out in North Queensland where they vastly increased the area of national parks and of forests controlled by government. They thought this would be wonderful because now all our native animals would have more habitat and more area to live in. What happened? The native animals were reduced. They disappeared in great numbers, far more than they ever had before. What was the cause of this terrible disappearance? Feral cats. Shutting up our forests was not doing any good as far as native animals are concerned.

Coming closer to home, our farmers here have a problem with native animals and wild dog packs. The dingoes have mated with domestic dogs and produced packs which live in our forests. We border one of these forests and we have plenty of these packs of wild animals. These wild dogs attack goats. The people who breed angora goats cannot keep their livestock alive. They attack lambs, sheep, horses, foals, pet dogs, wild dogs and pet cats.

With regard to cattle, in our situation they wait until our cows are down calving and they are at their most helpless and then they tear them to pieces and they tear their calves to pieces. It is a horrible thing to see. These dogs live in our forests. As our koala lady mentioned, these packs of dogs also attack koalas, so they destroy our wildlife as well. I cannot really see how increasing remnant forestry and native forests will protect our wildlife; it just seems to make it more dangerous for them.

With regard to protecting our forests themselves, the Gympie region has thousands of hectares of forestry, but it seems to be full of weeds which the landowners adjacent to the forests have trouble controlling and which spread into the adjacent land. It does not provide a safe habitat for animals. With regard to these forests, as several other people have already mentioned, the vegetation which will grow from there will become a major fuel hazard. Instead of having better old-growth forests, the forests will burn down, and you can see pictures of what happened in Tasmania in the forests there. There is nothing left—nothing at all—and it will never regenerate. We do not want that to happen to our forests in the Wide Bay.

Finally, I come to the cost of implementing this legislation. Not only will we need armies of bureaucrats to implement it at the administrative level; we will need inspectors to come to the properties to make sure that everything is done properly and we will need people to ensure that, if somebody does commit a crime, they will be arrested. The legislation itself is so unjust because the legislation is not only retrospective but also puts the onus of proof back on the person to prove they are innocent. For thousands of years the onus of proof has always been that the person is innocent until proven guilty, but now the person is going to be guilty until they are proved innocent. I will end with a quote of Martin Luther King, who said, 'Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.'

**HUNT, Mr Peter, Private capacity**

**Mr Hunt:** A neighbour has just bought a property two years ago and had no PMAV. He already had property all the way around it and he tried DNR at Kingaroy—not applicable. ‘You do not require it,’ he was told. He even went to Brisbane and got the same answer. When the map came out the other day, it had gone from 65 per cent white to somewhere between five and 10 per cent white. The land value is worth not too much at all. That is all I have to say.

**CLARK, Mr David, Private capacity**

**Mr Clark:** Thank you, Mr Chairman, and members of the committee for the opportunity to talk today. We have a property near Woodford-Kilcoy in the Moreton Bay Regional Council. I also work with landholders in parts of the Sunshine Coast hinterland in the flats, in the slopes and the hills, so over a fairly broad area. Our property is about 400 acres. About one-third of that is production country for trees and cattle. The other two-thirds is literally for the birds. We also run nature based tourism.

We are in a fortunate position in that we have a lock-in PMAV on our property so this legislation largely will not affect us, although I think long term as a result of this legislation land values will slide. The concern I have was raised more by neighbours and other people in our area who asked questions about why this colour is on our property. We looked at some of the areas around our place where there is proposed cat C and we could not understand why the proposed cat C is there. The example is a 50-hectare area of which 10 hectares is proposed cat C. We counted the trees in that area. There are 40 trees, three of which are lemon trees, so that equals four trees per hectare and it has been classed as cat C. It goes on from there. There are a lot of areas around the place that have no trees.

I have had discussions with DNRM about that. There are reasons for it and that can be a change in grass types, a change in slope on ridges and a whole range of other things like that. I am fortunate that I have a GIS background. As the committee would be aware, the cat C mapping is based on Landsat imagery. Landsat imagery is pixels made up of 25 by 25 metres. Those 25 by 25 metres are then converted to what is called a projected forest cover—I have that the wrong way around—but a number is nominated to each of those 25-by-25-metre squares from zero to 100. It is not as simple as that, but that is basically the way it runs.

We have ground-truthed a lot of those areas around our own area and also spot ground-truthed some of those areas where I work in the Sunshine Coast hinterland. I have also used the GIS to look behind those squares on maps and spent into the wee hours last night looking at thousands and thousands of them. The summation that I can contribute is that anywhere where those 25-by-25-metre squares have been allocated and numbered between 1 and 30, which my understanding pretty well represents one to 30 per cent ground cover, nearly all cases consistently were grass. There were not any trees in those areas. That is a major concern. Once you get up to about 70 per cent, consistently there are trees there. Once you get over 50, generally there are trees there and generally there are gaps in the trees. It would be true to say from the bit that I have seen that vegetation coverage greater than that 50 mark would be true.

When you are playing around with GIS there is a lot of stuff you can do. I think the numbers I have seen are pretty representative that where the number on those 25-by-25-metre squares is under 30 generally it is measuring something other than tree cover. It was consistent. It came up time and time again. You have attribute tables in the GIS system. You can sort that data out and you can end up with numbers at the end of the day. Over the projected foliage cover mapping for the Moreton Bay council and the Sunshine Coast area there is roughly 1.16 million of these 25-by-25-metre squares that have a number of 30 or less. If you round that off to a million of them, that is roughly 62,500 hectares.

From the ground-truthing I have done, it indicates that that is measuring grass. As you are probably aware, that projected foliage coverage map is what makes up cat C. To me it says that out of the 500,000 hectares that makes up Sunshine Coast and Moreton Bay Regional Council there is a large slab where that mapping probably is misrepresented. I hope that through these processes some of these things are looked at a lot more closely.

There are another million things that I have concerns about with this whole process and what it means for landholders. Part of my role with landholders is to convince them to put trees in. This has been the biggest negative impact I have seen in the last decade for landholders voluntarily putting trees in the ground. It has just smashed it, which is very unfortunate when that is what you are trying to achieve. There are a lot of production benefits from having trees out there, but when landholders are told that this is the sort of thing they have to do they lose all confidence in that process.

### **BANKS, Mr Gordon, Private capacity**

**Mr Banks:** I am a solicitor by profession and a forest farmer by obsession. I would like to speak generally to the legislation, but, firstly, might I ask the committee's leave to tender a paper that I did some 10 years ago and a letter with it indicating that I oppose the legislation in its entirety.

**CHAIR:** There being no objection, it is so tabled.

**Mr Banks:** I wish to speak generally about my background in forest and vegetation and then discuss the nature of the forests, the legislation, its problems and effects and some conclusions that I have made in respect of it. Is it real and what should we be doing? As to the forests, I will read a quote from the paper. The eucalypt forests are perceived as pristine, fragile and tenuous. They are, however, productive, adaptive, aggressive and persistent. They form disturbance adapted ecosystems, and disturbance is necessary for ecosystem functions. They recover quickly from major perturbations such as fire or mechanical damage. Aboriginal fire and hunting literally made the Australian environment that the Europeans first encountered. It was a vast 47,000-year-old human artefact. The forest environment was again substantially remade by Europeans altering the fire regime and introducing grazing animals. Because the main checks on regeneration—fire and grass competition—are now absent, forests have responded aggressively with explosive thickening.

If I can go back to my background, basically prior to the legislation beginning I was a member of the state government policy advisory committee. I served on the Commonwealth government's Farm Forestry Roundtable. I had the advantage of looking at forests throughout Australia. I wrote and presented papers at conferences throughout. Latterly, I served up till about 2006 on the building and development tribunal hearing appeals as a member in respect of vegetation clearing matters. In the course of my going about the country and talking to people, I had the advantage and privilege of speaking to lots of experts and lots of people who were involved in forest industries and grazing et cetera.

Getting on to the thickening that I described before, it is good in some parts. CO<sub>2</sub> is sequestered. It is bad in some other ways in that the thickening—and I think it was Burrows who said that water use by that thickening will reduce inflows to the Murray-Darling by about 40 per cent. Those cohorts of the biota—that is animals and plants that are adopted to the disturbance situation that was there before the thickening occurred—are disadvantaged. The state government itself identified thickening as a threatening process in some 40 regional ecosystems. The situation was that extreme bank erosion, sedimentation and that sort of thing was as a consequence of the trees killing the grass cover.

If the committee reads not all of the 688 submissions, can I recommend the Pinnacle Pocket Consulting submission, No. 53, and Burrows, which I think is 214. As to management, the red greens say that the absence of activity will protect the environment. The blue greens suggested no management is a recipe for serial degradation. Tim Flannery said, 'To think we can walk away from this new environment that history has created is a form of madness.'

If we devise a test for the legislation, does it prevent or discourage management? The criteria for that test is: does it add risk, expense and reduced reward? The risk is associated with policies and codes. The policy and codes are difficult to understand. They are not subject to debate. They are not subject to review in the parliament. They are executive determinations. In some ecosystems I understand that the regulations or the codes are going to consume almost the entire productive capacity of those forests to produce timber. In terms of grazing land, you have heard enough from people here as to how much of the productive capacity will be captured by these amendments. I did hear somebody on the radio say that, as far as agriculture is concerned, you cannot grow carrots in the forks of trees.

A further test other than the risk, expense and reward is the formal test administered by the Legislative Standards Act. I did put it to the lunch room in terms of retrospectivity and the reverse onus. I said, 'If you live at the Palms, it is 80 kilometres from the south side to Emu Creek. If the government says, 'Righto, we're going to reduce this to 60 in three months time,' and a week after the announcement you drive out there at 70 kilometres, it is legal then but in three months time it is going to be illegal. The kicker is that when they say you are exceeding the speed limit, they do not have to prove it; you have to prove that you were not. The lunch room said, 'That's ridiculous. That can't be.' The other thing that I might say is that the Law Society of Queensland—its submission is 625—agrees with the lunch room. It said, 'It's just ridiculous; it should not be.' It says it in more appropriate and accurate words, I suppose.

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The conclusion that I have come to is that these amendments are basically a lance with which we are going to tilt at windmills. The windmills is the monster of supposed environmental harm conjured up by the magic words 'carbon' and 'Great Barrier Reef'. There is credible evidence that Queensland is a net sink for carbon. In terms of the clearing, the SLATS data has been cherrypicked. Vegetable cover is, in fact, expanding. In relation to those boys who are crying wolf in terms of supposed environmental damage, it turns out that the wolf is a Pekingese.

The collateral damage done by this legislation is immense. What should we be doing about it? My belief is that there should be a rigorous scientific inquiry as to what is, in fact, happening with vegetation. There should be significant consultation. This legislation should not pass. We should start again.

One other thing that I can say is that one of the foremost coral reef scientists, a fellow called Starcke—in the quarterly there was an article to the effect that the reef has been subject to natural perturbations and what we are doing on the land has nothing to do with the reef health.

### **MULHOLLAND, Mrs Jan, Private capacity**

**Mrs Mulholland:** My name is Jan Mulholland. I own property at Widgee Crossing, which is just below Gympie on the Mary River; our property straddles the Mary River and it is about a thousand acres. We run beef cattle on the property. The family Mulholland took up the first land in 1870 and the family has owned the property and, further than that, has extended it since that time. You can imagine that we have experienced many flood events on that property.

I can say that, in my time, since 1970, the last flood caused the most major damage to the banks through our place. I am very definite that that was caused by activities at Widgee Crossing. Where once the road crossed the river there, the road now does not; it has been closed off. That was caused by four-wheel-drive vandals who went down to the crossing there on the unsealed road and on the river banks and did enormous damage. Neither the council nor the police activated any consequences to stop them. They just continued on and on until there was a severe accident involving a little family with babies and children in their vehicles that nearly rolled into a metre of water. The children were strapped into their restraints and if it had turned over there would have been major consequences. Council now has closed the road.

What happened in our place was a domino effect. Widgee Crossing is now just washed out; there is no way you can drive across there. You can drive across the ford, which we do; we go out of our place across the ford and back into our place with the tractor. No other vehicles can go across or drive down. There used to be a bridge a long time ago. That is all gone, too. These four-wheel-drive vandals damaged the bank so much that the banks were nearly straight upright. There was a domino effect down through our place including our pumping site.

We have not done a thing to the riverbank since that flood. We have just left it to see if it will just hold itself. I do not know what we can do. Some of the banks are just straight up and down and some are not quite. We will just see what happens with the next flood. At this stage we do not know what will happen. That was the damage that was caused there by four-wheel-drive vandals. That is another thing you can put on your list.

I would really like to read a couple of pages here. I know we all want to get home to watch the footy. It is a submission which I would like to table, if I may, please. The Deputy Premier, Jackie Trad, said Labor's vegetation management policy was key to persuading UNESCO not to declare the Great Barrier Reef in danger at a meeting in Bonn, Germany last year. These new laws are entirely to satisfy that statement. No proper thought has been given. Without scientific evidence, this proposed legislation is nothing but dictatorship. What proven science is there that agriculture is actually causing damage to the Great Barrier Reef? There are currently northern parts of the reef far distant from areas under agriculture that are showing bleaching, whereas there are other parts where the land is under agriculture that are not affected. What scientific investigation has been undertaken, for example, to establish that naturally occurring oceanic events may be the cause of bleaching? What scientific investigation has been undertaken that proves that bleached parts of the reef do or do not regenerate? Investigation would likely reveal that the reef has coped for all time with bleaching from natural environmental causes and has always re-established itself. Why do farmers have to bear the blame? What scientific evidence is there that clearing land for high-value agriculture or irrigated high-value agriculture has affected or will affect the reef?

Landowners are acutely aware and responsible in making decisions on best environmentally effective, good farming practices. In our very own district here, Labor shut down a wonderful longstanding and much valued primary production industry in the Mary Valley. Yes, Labor did that, without proper thought or any surety that the Traveston Crossing dam would even go ahead. What is that land producing now? Giant rat's tail and other noxious weeds that are washed downstream to contaminate other properties.

Where are our future families going to get their food from? Here in Gympie, we used to have hundreds of children attending school; now we have thousands. You can see them marching proudly down Mary Street on Anzac Day. They eat pasta today, but when they grow up they will be looking for heaps more fresh fruit and vegetables. Never mind about supplying to overseas countries; where will our families get their food if we cannot expand our cultivations to grow the food? They will have to eat trees.

Why can the man on the land not be left to farm without all this extra burden? He should be allowed to expand if he needs to. Our growing population needs more food and we, as genuine Aussies, know how to farm responsibly. The current legislation is a sufficient guide in protecting the environment.

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Weather events over eons have washed soil particles down rivers and into the oceans. Rivers have changed courses and riverbanks have eroded without any intervention by man. That, however, does not mean that we as landholders should not do all we can to prevent our actions from causing more erosion. Landholders are acutely aware of the need to protect our Great Barrier Reef. There is no need for us to be dictated to, as this proposed legislation does.

The proposed legislation is not the answer. Current legislation is a sufficient guide. Changing the current legislation is not warranted. Farmers should not be penalised for acting reasonably in the ongoing care and maintenance of their land. If there is any doubt, then it should be innocent until proven guilty in front of a judge.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much. I call on our last speaker for the evening, Kayle Findlay.

**FINDLAY, Mr Kayle, Private capacity**

**Mr Findlay:** Thank you, Mr Chairman. I am from Gunalda, approximately 30 kilometres north of Gympie. I wear two hats. I am not only a grazier but also a commercial beekeeper, so I see both sides of this argument. As a grazier, I locked in my country several years ago. Recently on television, I saw Kate Jones talking about sediment run-off from farms. I can assure you that the sediment run-off from my farm is actually coming from regrowth areas locked in under the PMAV. Where I have cleared right beside and up to those areas now grows a beautiful body of feed through the eucalypts. I have not cleared everything. I think most people in this day and age do not wish to clear everything. They just want to go through and take out the rubbish.

The other concern that I have with locking up under these PMAVs is the giant rat's tail grass. Now I am not able to access a lot of the country with a tractor or ute in order to spray the grass, so I have to do it with a knapsack. It means a huge amount of time wasted. Wild pigs have not been mentioned in this before. We have had an itinerant population of wild pigs come through. I do dread the day when I will stumble across an old sow with a couple of piglets. It will be awful hard to scamper up a tree with a knapsack on my back.

The other thing from a beekeeping point of view is that most of this thick regrowth, particularly in this area, is of no value to bees. It is just too thick. My family has been beekeeping since the early to mid 1970s on a commercial basis. We travel extensively. I have seen more country go down under the chain and by the axe since the first legislation under Peter Beattie started. Before that, yes, timber went down, but people were changing their ideas about timber. That has all gone now, because they just do not trust governments. Instead of bringing the people with them and continuing the good work that was done through organisations such as the beef liaison group and the likes—and this went right around the state—that now has stopped and people totally distrust the government.

I see areas that, before Beattie brought in his legislation, were being rung out. The regrowth was being re-rung. People were leaving much more timber. From a beekeeping point of view, it would have been nice to see a lot more, but you could see the change. Just recently I was in the Burnett looking at some of my beekeeping country. One of the paddocks had been done before Beattie brought in his legislation. The paddock right beside it on the same property has only been redone in about the last 12 months. There is nothing left. They have rung the whole lot. You cannot blame the farmers for doing that. At the end of the day, they are the ones paying the mortgage and they are the ones paying the increase in rates every year.

It has got to a point where there is distrust of government with all this legislation, which really just ties the whole lot up and you just cannot do anything on your own property. It has got to a point where, if people can get it down, they will take the lot. At the end of the day, those guys who chained all that country now do not have a problem. However, there are people who have tried to do the right thing and have left timber. They just want to go through and take out the rubbish—continually go back. They have let the eucalypts grow. The younger timber comes through all the time. Basically, it is farm forestry, you could call it. Most of the timber on my country is not worth two bob, as far as timber value goes, but it is there for both nature and ourselves. We both have to survive.

As a beekeeper as well as a cattleman, I do see both sides of the argument. I am totally against this legislation for the total damage it has done over the past 10 or 12 years or however long it has been going on. Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much for that. The time allocated for tonight's meeting of the Agriculture and Environment Committee has expired. I thank all witnesses who have appeared tonight. It has been very valuable to the committee. Once again, thank you all very much for coming, especially on State of Origin night. May the best team win, which is Queensland, by the way!

**Committee adjourned at 6.37 pm**