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## SUBMISSION TO:

Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation  
Amendment Bill 2016

## SUBMISSION COVER SHEET

Closing date for submissions is 25 April 2016.

Please complete and submit this form with your submission to:

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If part, please identify which sections are confidential: N/A

Reason for confidentiality: N/A

## SUBMISSION

I provide my submission in support of the continuation of the Current Vegetation Management Act 1999 and rejection of the changes proposed in the Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 ("the Bill").

My overriding issue with the Bill is that its introduction in the Queensland Parliament on 17<sup>th</sup> March represents *yet another* variation to the Vegetation Management Framework, which has been amended over 18 times since its introduction in 1999. This constant change in legislation severely impacts on the ability of farm managers to plan and implement effective long-term property and business management decisions. Ecological processes work in much longer timeframes and can be severely compromised when mismatching, constantly changing regulations are enforced. Farmers have long called for certainty with the vegetation management regulatory framework. With the Bill being introduced when farmers are on their knees with over 86% of Queensland in drought conditions, it should come as no surprise that I am totally opposed to continued uncertainty and attacks on the viability of myself, the long-term sustainability of my business as well as attacks on fellow farmers.

\*A. On my property, the impact of the continual change in vegetation management regulation is that I too have approached the government due to the concerns of regrowth to the point that mustering is becoming troublesome, on speaking to an Environment Office I was told if I pay \$2000 I could clear the land on my own freehold. This was recently – last year! I was advised of solacious 1 solacious 2 and basalt on the area to be cleared. The basalt being young soil of which I am allowed to clear all vegetation on notification, of the other two types of soils solacious 1 and solacious 2 a host tree must be left every 50 metres and with solacious 1 if I paid \$2380 for a permit I can also clear that area of vegetation leaving a host tree every 50 metres.

I pointed out that I have an option of fencing and making smaller manageable paddocks, and with the basalt I wished to improve the pastures and was advised that they would tell me what grasses I could sow. This is now – surely with these protocols being controlled by the environmentalists why would you need more control. These pastures require access due to the increasing woody weeds taking over the high value pasture.

I have the source of the West Normanby and the Laura Rivers starting on my property, when these rivers run during monsoonal, cyclonic, deluge rains we are talking a minimum of 200ml (8in) in 24 hours, both of these rivers rise to from 8-10 mtrs on the Laura, and 10-20mts on the West Normanby. These sources have been untouched in the last at least 100 years so you have to wonder why you would want to have control of a natural area that looks after itself, along with the monitoring of the landholder to continue to eradication of feral weeds, etc.

The river banks and the flood plains are constantly uprooted by feral brumbies, feral pigs, the native wild life, dessimated by wild dogs, cats, the constant uncontrolled burning and fires deliberately started by the National Parks is horrendous on wildlife and vegetation. National Parks officers start these fires without notification, no control measures in place, and no personnel on the ground. I have received 1 email advising me to keep an eye on the fire to the east of me, which was started in the National Parks by our National Parks Officers. There are no fire breaks to



contain their burns, a lack of manpower, and absolutely no compensation when they burn out 260sq km of a 360 sq km property which was last year whilst in drought conditions when the cattle were requiring every single blade of grass just to survive.

When discussed with the National Parks in regard to cattle control in the National Park, they were advised that the burning attracts the cattle, their reply was that they will continue to burn to stop the encroaching rainforest into the buffer zone and into the Savannah.

The amount of runoff which then follows after these fires, the rivers run black and grey and kill many species of animals, frogs, fish, etc downstream.

I can only access part of my property through the National Park and the adjacent property, I have found exotic weeds, wild cattle, cats, pigs, wild dogs in the national park and on my own property adjacent to my property. In discussions re the boundary between me and the National Parks with the object being to contain and restrict the movement of cattle through the National Park I have found exotic grasses, evidence of dope growing activities in these inaccessible areas where the only access is through the National Parks who maintain keys and control of everyone who enters.

Without the constant control of vegetation on tracks and trails in these dense, rain forest areas, the abundance of weeds which have already taken hold will be unable to be eradicated, hence the National Parks will end up being National Weed Parks.

Having accessed the back of my property for the first time last year and gaining a permit to access the Windsor National Park I have witnessed first hand that all is not what it seems when it comes to our so-called custodians of our National Parks. I intend forwarding a copy of this to the Qld Premier, for these decisions are made and bulldozed through our parliament without satisfactory consultation of the primary production industry to even forward a reply.

I am a regular visitor to the Lakefield National Park and have friends who have properties adjacent to this park, I have been disappointed with the lack of effort by the custodians of these parks to control, minimise and eradicate exotic weeds and feral animals from these areas by the appointed custodians.

The banks do not look favourably on the lack of a secure prospect for effective development due to the constant changing of this vegetation management legislation and are becoming very reluctant in regards to accessing of finance.

The value of my farm will be significantly decreased due to its reduced potential for development.

Because I did not apply before this latest Bill, I missed the opportunity to secure a HVA clearing permit or a PMAV and it looks like now there will be no possibility for this, and even if I did have one, the government under the new ruling would just revoke it like they did when they removed several of my fishing symbols on a licence I bought back in 1985. Hence the licence ended up worthless, yet I bought it for \$35 000 back in 1985 – this was due to legislation changes to GBRMNPA and although I fought it in an appeal because they advised I did qualify, they also advised they never had any intention of returning my symbols to my licence.

In providing this submission I refer directly to the key provisions of the legislation which the 2016 Bill intends to amend.

# 1. Removing High Value Agriculture and Irrigated High Value Agriculture from the Vegetation Management Framework

## Background

The removal of High Value Agriculture (HVA) and irrigated HVA (IHVA) affects farmers in regions differently, with those in the north particularly hard hit. Throughout northern Queensland energy and protein become limiting in cattle diets during the dry season and this can cause farmers issues with stock survival and welfare through years of drought. HVA and IHVA permits provide farmers in northern Queensland with the opportunity to grow fodder and grain for supplementing in the dry season and finishing off stock for market.

The removal of HVA and IHVA is in direct conflict with the Australian Government White Paper on the Development of Northern Australia. A current example of this is \$220 million being spent to upgrade roads to communities across Cape York, but Queensland State Government Vegetation Management Framework is preventing indigenous and non-indigenous land holders from developing agriculture projects.

In central and southern Queensland, HVA and IHVA provides opportunity for farmers to drought-proof properties and stabilise production and income over variable climatic and market conditions. Sustainable clearing for relatively small pockets of high value agriculture enable agricultural production to improve continuity of supply to food processors and meet the increasing requirements of international markets and Australia's Free Trade Agreements.

Indigenous development is particularly compromised by the re-inclusion of High Value Regrowth (HVR) as well as the stripping of the right to develop traditional lands as HVA or IHVA. For example, Indigenous landowners on the Gilbert River in northern Queensland preparing to submit IHVA applications have now been denied the possibility of stabilising beef production and employing community labour on their properties.

With what we have to cover in regards to environmental issues and land management controls already in place, these are there to ensure that mass devastation of our vegetation areas does not occur and that productivity and progress can work hand in hand for the betterment/sustainability of our lands, not to just lock it up and become another weed infested part of Australia.

\*B.The removal of HVA/IHVA will impact on my capacity to plan property management and develop country due to not being able to access different parts of my cattle station to control weeds and feral animals, I shall not be able to improve my pastures for the benefit of grazing cattle or further develop and expand into eco-tourism if I wanted, as we are the highest cattle station in Australia. We have some of the few large forest areas which sustainably harvested is a valuable renewable resource to this country.

If we are restricted in the clearing of land to build dams for making our property more drought resistant, then our cattle will wander looking for water and feed and once again more cattle will be in the National Parks, cause they have no where else to go. We are missing over 650 head of cattle all tagged (over the last 13 years), branded and only females, we are also missing a further 350 head due to the offspring of these cows.

Water is a growing discussion point in our community as we have 4 big banana farms employing 100's of people daily, and our water usage if of grave concern within our community, we are in



the process of constructing a solar farm, another large community project and have several large dam sites allocated for approval for the use of the community and farming so as our future water concerns can be met.

Our population is growing and to maintain produce from Australia we need to keep expanding, not just to feed us but to feed the world. Australia has always been a primary producer of beef, we don't need this industry to disappear due to a bunch of tree huggers, who don't really know or help in any regard at all.

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## 2. Re-introducing Reverse Onus-of-Proof

### Background

The inclusion of Reverse Onus of Proof in Queensland Government's Vegetation Management Framework is a direct affront to the rights and liberties of farmers. Reverse Onus relegates farmers clearing vegetation to a level below that of criminals, where they are denied common justice under Section 24 of the Criminal Code: Mistake of fact. In Queensland not only are farmers presumed guilty until they are proven innocent, but they are refused the possibility of making a mistake.

To regard our nations hardest workers(farmers) as criminals is unjustifiable. We don't work 9-5, we work from 5-9, our work never stops, whether it's building floodgates, containing cattle, feral eradication of weeds and animals, fighting bushfires, maintaining firebreaks, mustering cattle, improving pastures, building dams for cattle (to become drought resistant), fixing machinery – we are the custodians of our land and we are the ones responsible for it, I don't see 100 backpackers being paid by the government for a days work on my property to help the eradication of feral weeds and animals which do more destruction than you could possibly imagine to our environment and the impact it has on the GBRMP.

Yes, we ask our local government in at Mareeba in regards to land clearing and mining, I can also access this information on the Government Website, when I have reliable communications coverage. The proposed NBN rollout promised, well we are still waiting for it in this country, let alone basic Telstra mobile coverage. Farmers live remote.

It is clear on the map but unfortunately it does not correlate with the actual soil types, ie there might be a blanket of zoning and there might be a basalt plateau in the middle, so on the one hand it is zoned saying you cannot clear the land, the contradiction being it is a basalt area of which you are permitted to clear all trees.

It is not cheap to develop country and clearing is not undertaken without serious investment, the amount of time, effort and money to develop country isn't very often profitable. By the time all of our costs are taken into account and we manage to get our cattle to the saleyards – we don't even cover expenses a lot of the time, due to poor cattle prices which has engulfed this industry up until recently. So I shall put it to you this way, it is a 'catch 22' situation where you are clearing land (which costs money) for the improvement of pastures to supply healthy

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feed to cattle to feed beef to the population.\*C

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3. That no compensation will be payable to HVA, IHVA and Property Map of Assessable Vegetation (PMAV) applicants during transitional arrangements

#### Background

The proposal that compensation will not be available for HVA, IHVA or PMAV applicants during the Bill transition period may be a tactic to prevent panic clearing, but the implications for compensation for vegetation management in the broader sense are quite alarming.

With the cessation of broad scale land-clearing, compensation for landholders to offset opportunity cost, lost development potential and decreased property value has been a critical omission from the Vegetation Management Regulatory Framework. The issue of compensation has been debated heavily by federal and state legislators, however a precedent was set by the Beattie Government in 2004 with provision of \$150 million over 5 years to offset landholder losses due to the removal of their rights to clear. This however was a copout with the funds unable to provide effective recompense for opportunity costs incurred, despite prior assessment undertaken for the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry in 2003. In 2004, there was no doubt considerable rejoicing by the Queensland Government who boasted of compensating carbon dioxide abatement for less than \$1 a tonne!

In the 2016 Bill transition period the situation is quite different to what it was in 2004. The threat to remove HVA and IHVA from farmers' potential to develop property provides considerable grounds for compensation, particularly for those that have structured investments and farm management activities to take advantage of HVA/IHVA in the near future. Also HVA/IHVA has attracted far greater interest in northern Queensland, with large swathes of marginal beef production areas provided the opportunity of growing supplementary feed to overcome the protein drought in the dry season.

The 2003 Commonwealth study mentioned above did not include north or west Queensland Local Government Areas and consequently grossly underestimated the areas to be considered for compensation. Another change since 2004 is the free market recognition of the value of carbon abatement with the recent auction of the Emissions Reduction Fund selling carbon at \$12.25 per tonne. The Queensland State Government needs to recognise the fact that they are robbing the rights of farmers to develop productive HVA/IHVA land sustainably and that the area for development and value for carbon are much greater than they were in 2004.

The High Value regrowth should be offset to the landholder, because if he can't clear the regrowth then pastures will be restricted and not improved and the actually mustering will take twice as long, be more hazardous/dangerous, and other associated added costs.

\*D-The impact of proposed High-Value-Regrowth provisions on your will impact on the quality and quantity of my cattle, which will do nothing to offset the amount of pigs, brumbies, feral cattle etc from producing methane and still destroying the local habitat. If you're worried about the carbon offsets, then why doesn't the government cease the activity of uncontrolled burning every single year in the National Park, producing the sediment into our rivers and then onto the

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| GBRMP (which is what this is all about).  |
| 4. Including High Value Regrowth as an additional layer of regulation under the Vegetation Management Framework on leasehold, freehold and indigenous land  |
| <p><b>Background</b></p> <p>The re-inclusion of High Value Regrowth (HVR) as an additional layer of regulation on leasehold, freehold and indigenous land is an overt grab by Queensland Government in search of targets for meeting international treaties such as the Kyoto Protocol and more recently the 2015 Paris Climate Deal. In 2009 when initially introduced, this HVR layer was prepared hastily in a 'desktop' mapping exercise with associated errors including areas of non-native vegetation (such as orchards) and bare earth. In preliminary investigations of several properties it appears that the accuracy of the 2016 HVR is no better than that in 2009.</p> <p>If the free market places a value of \$12.25 per tonne on carbon, what is the estimated dollar value of "High Value Regrowth" and where is the Queensland Government's recompense for farmers and indigenous land holders?</p> <p><u>*E- The Qld Gov has just approved how many coal mine ventures offsetting how many carbon emissions, and at what price? Grass contains carbon, so cattle eat grass, to control carbon stop selling coal!</u></p> <p><u>Yes we have knowledge of the Proposed Regulated Vegetation Management Maps, the mapping is not entirely accurate as I am sure you are already aware. Mapping by computer is not the same as mapping on the land.</u></p> <p><u>We farmers have more than enough to do in regards to being custodians of our land, we also have to make a living, I, for one am so sick of the government making mistakes only to say that if you are wrong then I have to go about collating evidence to prove your inaccuracies.</u></p> <p><u>The cost to my business due to incorrect mapping is entirely dependent on the area incorrectly mapped, but it also may be due to what you call a valuable regrowth, if is a shitty woody weed then it isn't ten metres tall and 2 metres round and valuable, it is 6 spindly sticks of weed a metre high, which is of no value.</u></p> <p><u>My understanding of high-value regrowth is that the carbon contained in a tree/shrub/bush, etc is beneficial to the environment and mankind, or that a plantation tree is planted for example, carbon is contained, that tree is then harvested not releasing the carbon, as in furniture wood, timbers etc.</u></p> |
| 5. Increasing Category R vegetation to include the Burdekin, Mackay, Whitsunday and Wet Tropics Great Barrier Reef catchments and additional catchments Burnett Mary, Eastern Cape York and Fitzroy.  |

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#### Background

This increase in Category R provisions is a further restriction on development in Northern Queensland, which is in stark contrast to the development imperatives contained with the White Paper on Developing Northern Australia.

The science is completely unproven on the necessity to include ≥50 metre buffers along streamlines. In fact, a study conducted in Queensland and published in 2016 shows that grass is a far better assimilator for nitrogen to prevent leaching into waterways. The current bleaching of the Great Barrier Reef is not caused by high nutrient runoff from agricultural lands.

\*f.

As Queenslanders we want our country to prosper, be it indigenous/non-indigenous communities we would prefer that with progress comes more opportunities for employment so that these welfare areas are not reliant on government tax payers funding.

If the bill is amended then we are stagnating growth in our communities for advancement in farming opportunities, as all activities will become restrictive, unless you pay a fee to that particular department and then you can carry on with the activity. So isn't this all just a revenue raising project, because if you were serious then no coal would ever leave Australia's shores.

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6. Other matters relevant to the Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 that the review committee should consider appropriate and worth some consideration

My other problem is that you speak about the landholders/custodians being responsible to all these different issues on our land. We consult with government officials in regards to weeds and they tell us they have a certain amount in their budget to help us farmers on the land cover the associated costs of control – but then we don't ever see these people again, as they aren't always passing by our front gate to drop off promised eradication of weeds by the use of chemicals.

We are required to have a 20million dollar public liability insurance to trap cattle in part of the National Park for a period of only 2 weeks of the year, however when they burn't out 2/3 of our property, they informed us that they have no public liability or insurance to compensate for damage, loss of fodder, loss of cattle, (as stated before we were in drought when this occurred last year).

Also the National allowed and promoted access to our cattle station to various other entities, being James Cook University, themselves and research scientists carrying out studies on different animals/birds, etc. At no time over the 13 years since they owned that part of the Park have they ever contacted us (their neighbour) to inform us or request access onto my property. There has been lick shelters, loading ramps, yards, dope plantations on and about the National Park and my leasehold land, all accessed via the National Park.

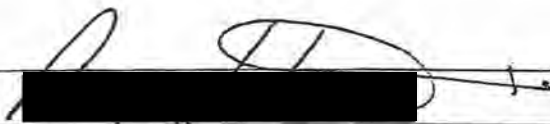

So no I certainly don't want the government to get any further involved in controlling the



resources of our country, as it only benefits them, not the everyday Australian who pays for these Parks. They don't even know where the boundaries are – it's beyond ridiculous!

I could keep going!!!!!!!!!!AG.

And yes these changes will not only affect myself but the future generations of Australians, who will have no land to produce great food and sustainable renewable resources!

|          |   |
|----------|---|
| Signed:  |                  |
| Address: |  CAIRNS QLD 4871 |
| Date:    | 18/4/16   |