

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:

Email:
vminquiry@parliament.qld.gov.au**Post:** **Fax:** 07 3553 6699Research Director
Agriculture and Environment
Committee
Parliament House
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Organisation or individual:	Booroondarra Pastoral Company		
Principal contact:	John Baker		
Position:	Partner		
Telephone:	[REDACTED]		
Mobile:	[REDACTED]		
Email address:	[REDACTED]		
Street address:	[REDACTED]		
Suburb/City:	Middlemount	State: Qld	Postcode: 4746
Postal address:	[REDACTED]		
Suburb/City:	Middlemount	State: Qld	Postcode: 4746

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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 17th 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.**

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
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Background

With the World population continuing to increase and the area of agricultural land decreasing due to the urban sprawl and mining, we have to use every tool at our disposal to be able to produce enough food to help feed a population which is increasingly demanding the quality food that we can produce.

There are many opportunities for clearing for High Value Agriculture that will help drought proof individual properties and new developments will provide much needed employment in Regional Centres.

There is enormous potential throughout our great state for increased production from High Value Agriculture, therefore we need to be able to develop more areas to help with this task.

2. Re-introducing Reverse Onus-of-Proof

***C.**

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 is discriminatory and 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.

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

*D.

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.

4. Including High Value Regrowth as an additional layer of regulation under the Vegetation Management Framework on leasehold, freehold and indigenous land

*E.

Background

The re-inclusion of High Value Regrowth (HVR) as an additional layer of regulation on leasehold, freehold and indigenous land will reduce the value and production ability of affected properties with areas of regrowth degenerating into a dense tangle of suckers that has no resemblance to the original landscape and no habitat for the native wildlife.

Grass and ground cover are essential to prevent erosion and to hold the soil together, it is well recognised that trees alone do not prevent erosion and that when trees are allowed to grow unchecked they will thicken to the extent of choking out the grasses and reduce ground cover causing increased erosion.

In preliminary investigations of several properties it appears that the accuracy of the 2016 HVR is no better than that in 2009 when it was shown to include bare areas and orchards.

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?

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.

*F.

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.

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

*G.

Signed:	John Baker	
Address:		Middlemount 4746
Date:	20/04/16	