

SUBMISSION REGARDING CURRENT VEGETATION MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK ON BEHALF OF HIGH COUNTRY PASTORAL PTY LTD

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HOW IT AFFECTS US

Our cattle station has 2500Ha of cleared land for cropping. The property is one of a few viable businesses in the region during a drought period and arguably during most seasons. With the past three years seeing less than a third of the average rainfall, which is a lot more than others were receiving, the business has been able to stay afloat only because of the cropping opportunities. We were able to sell fat cattle when others had to shoot theirs in the paddock because they were starving. We were able to have a strong breeder herd who could support their calves and healthy enough to get pregnant again so we have a product to sell in a couple of years. We were able to spell paddocks during the entire dry-season and turn cattle out to graze them during the wet. We have the opportunity to grow hay, sorghum, corn, legumes or any other crop we choose because of the basalt soil, the climate, and the annual rainfall. It is because of good management principles and the cleared agricultural land we were able to sell cattle when the prices were good. And so we have been able to afford to continue to do invest in works to drought-proof our property and to grow another crop, sink bores, run pipelines, buy machinery etc. This season has brought average rainfall and we look set to harvest a magnificent yield from our sorghum crop. This feed will see us not only fatten cattle for slaughter in the coming year, but if need be, to support those cattle doing it tough in another drought season. The feed can store for 10 years. The property has been granted approval to clear 15000 acres for High Value Agriculture. This land is perfect for farming. It is not marginal country, it is well watered and nutrient rich viable land which has the potential to be and produce amazing crops. It will allow our operation to become the most significant cropping and grazing farm in the area. This will also mean more work/jobs for not only our own workforce but the wider community, from the delivery drivers, to the agents, to the local ag products store, to the cattle transport. Locals rely on us, on other farms, on the opportunity for expansion in the region in the agricultural sector.

Dr Bill Burrows explains, 'Trees are actively encroaching on some native grasslands. Examples of this changing structure and composition of Europeans first arrived with their domestic livestock. Moreover if we allow this 'thickening' trend to continue we are putting at risk the viability of many existing agricultural enterprises. The 'intact' woodland which is the subject of the present discussion has previously been set aside by government for agricultural land use (farming and grazing). The import of this is that, when bans on broad-scale tree clearing were first contemplated, it was

accepted by both levels of government and the major political parties that this would detrimentally impact agricultural production.¹

On our cleared and pastured country, we can run a beast to the acre, with rotational management maintaining a sustainable grass recovery. On the un-cleared country we are lucky to run a beast to 20 acres plus the chance of lantana poisoning increased dramatically. Red-soil country in the area sells for an average of \$6000/acre when cleared and able to be grazed. The country that needs to be cleaned is not an attractive asset for farming investors or banks to loan against and only suits tree-changers who are not willing to pay anywhere near the \$6000/acre. It costs us \$400/acre to clean. We do not get any government assistance even though we are clearly managing pest species of flora and assisting fire control.



Figure 1 LANTANA UNDERSTORY

¹ Dr Bill Burrows, Vegetation Management in Queensland-Some essential facts for politicians, rural industry and all Queenslanders, P4



Figure 2 REGROWTH AND LANTANA WEED



Figure 3 CLEARED VS UNCLEARED REGROWTH



Figure 4 PARK-LIKE open forest improved pastures decreasing run-off

Clear



Figure 5 CLEARED VS UNCLEARED REGROWTH

Furthermore, prior to European settlement indigenous Australians would burn the country every few years allowing for the woody undergrowth to be controlled. This is not a current practice.

The southern states and also Queensland have seen an increase in destructive fires since closing national parks to grazing, which is another form of sustainable and manageable vegetation control.

Clearing of land for grazing and cropping and removal of regrowth which is spoiling the productivity of the land, when done in the right way, will only add environmental and economic value to the property itself, the community and the country.

HOW IT AFFECTS THE AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY

Re-introducing the punitive laws which are discriminatory against farmers and allowing exemptions for foreign investors and mining is a backward step in progress and directly opposite to the aims of the proposed development of the North of Australia in the White Paper released in September Last year. Finally!! Those of us in the North, struggling for so long had the hope of support for development and the promise of job-creation for 55,000. Most of the Norths employment is directly related to the beef industry, particularly in the remote and rural towns.

The Greens who are driving the push for the Labor Government to wind-back the clearing laws, are ignorant of the devastating effects on development of the Primary Industries in Northern Australia.

It's not only the farmers, it's the traditional owners and the Northern Indigenous communities of the north who are crushed that the impending changes would see their communities pushed further into poverty. Wik Mukan tribal elder and cattleman [REDACTED] recently attended an Agforce workshop in Coen with AgForce president Grant Maudsley who has said the Queensland Government could start by removing the uncertainty over future agricultural development by scrapping its planned changes to the State's vegetation management laws. "It's clear both indigenous and non-indigenous graziers on the Cape will be prevented from developing their properties and growing more of their own hay to feed cattle," Mr Maudsley said. "Traditional owners and long-time cattle producers are telling us that this issue has united them in a way that hasn't happened for many years." They are angry that there has been little or no consultation by the Government about the proposed changes and this is creating frustration and confusion.²

When the Labour Government banned the live-export in a knee-jerk decision based on the Four-Corners footage, they didn't consider the cruelty that would result in their own backyard of the surplus cattle doomed to starve. They haven't seen first-hand the devastation of the people who work so hard to care for the land and the animals they raise. They didn't consider the suicides directly related to the drought and the live export ban and the inability for families to repay their mortgages.

Let us prevent this happening again. At time when cattle prices are where they should be, and those that have had some drought-breaking rain can focus on re-building their livelihood and FEEDING PEOPLE!!

² <http://www.queenslandcountrylife.com.au/story/3852417/landholders-say-new-tree-laws-threaten-job-creation/> 17th April 2015.

WHERE ATTENTION AND FUNDING SHOULD BE FOCUSED AND SPENT

Instead of punishing farmers, the community needs to rally behind them. Subsidising, and supporting high value agriculture is necessary for the country to continue to be a player in the export of high-quality sustainably –grown produce. Australia is up-in-arms about the Chinese investors buying land in the country. But the Chinese are business minded. They have the interest of their growing population in mind. The Australian people need to be educated into the reasons why landholders to clear the land and manage regrowth.

WHY CURRENT LEGISLATION SHOULD REMAIN

Drought-resilience, and proofing property

Diversification

Revenue

Bridging the gap between industry and opportunities between the north and south of the state. A blanket