

22 April 2016

**SUBMISSION TO: VEGETATION MANAGEMENT (REINSTATEMENT) AND OTHER  
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2016**

**POST:** Research Director  
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**SUMBISSION**

The following submission is made on behalf of MSF Sugar Limited, which has been prepared following a review of the *Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016*.

It is understood that on 17 March 2016, the *Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016* was introduced to the Queensland Parliament which has in turn been referred to the Agriculture and Environment Committee who are to provide a report on the Bill by 30 June 2016. Further, it is understood that submissions regarding the proposed legislation can be lodged for consideration before the closing date being Monday 25 April 2016.

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The specific focus of this submission is to express deep concern in relation to the amendments proposed under the Bill with particular reference to the removal of 'High Value Agriculture' and 'Irrigated High Value Agriculture' as a 'relevant purpose' from the legislation.

As stakeholders in the land which is to be directly affected by this new legislation, this submission is provided in an attempt to appeal the States decision in implementing such restrictions as the impacts of the Bill will have severe impacts on Queensland agricultural industry.

The following context and background information is provided in accordance with the submission to assist with the Committees understanding of consequences such legislation will have on the State.

## **1. MSF Sugar Limited Background**

MSF Sugar has a long and robust 124 year heritage in Australia with particular focus on agribusiness throughout Queensland.

We take pride in the fact that we are Australia's largest sugarcane farmer, second largest raw sugar exporter and third largest miller. At present, MSF Sugar operates 4 sugar mills located at Gordonvale (South Cairns), South Johnstone (Innisfail), Atherton Tablelands and Maryborough.

We currently own approximately 5,500 hectares of land in the Maryborough region and 8,000 hectares in Far North Queensland with sugarcane sources being provided from our own property holdings as well as approximately 630 independent growers (some of whom lease land from us).

Aside from our focus on the sugarcane industry, we have recently expanded into renewable energy using by-products of the mill operations (Bagasse). This growth paired with our ongoing sugarcane operations has allowed us to become more sustainable, provide job security for our valued employees and support the agricultural industry throughout Queensland.

In addition to these completed activities, MSF Sugar is currently considering a number of development opportunities in all operating regions which are primarily focused on the sugar cane industry.

## **2. Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016**

In order to secure our product, MSF Sugar has been known to purchase both existing farms as well as greenfield lots with intention of cultivating the properties for the purposes of sugarcane production. This process has allowed us to expand the business, while supporting farmers and providing job stability within the industry.

Under the current provisions of the *Vegetation Management Act 1999*, clearing for 'High Value Agriculture' and 'Irrigated High Value Agriculture' is permissible as the action is considered to be a 'relevant purpose'.

The clearing required to set up sugar cane farms on greenfield sites is dependent upon this section of the Act as no alternative purpose for clearing the vegetation is applicable.

Upon review of the proposed Vegetation Bill 2016, MSF Sugar were highly concerned to note the States intention to remove the 'High Value Agriculture' and 'Irrigated High Value Agriculture' from the list of 'Relevant Purposes', thus removing the ability to clear any vegetation in support of setting up new farms throughout Queensland.

If implemented this action will directly impair the business growth strategy for MSF Sugar and the positive impact of this strategy on our employees, cane suppliers and the local communities in which we operate.

An actual example of the impact of the proposed changes to legislation will be that we will have to cancel the proposed development of 4,000 ha of Unallocated State Land at Maryborough into a world class irrigated sugar cane farm. This is a development being supported by State Development and will generate approximately 100 direct and indirect full time jobs in the region. This development was to be the cornerstone investment for the development of a large scale green co-generation electricity power plant and ethanol facility at Maryborough. Without the development of the additional farming area in Maryborough the overall project is not financially viable and will therefore result in around \$500 million in lost investment opportunity for Queensland.

The proposed changes are considered to be an extreme reaction to recent developments within the State whereby vegetation clearing has been carried out in radical circumstances. As a result, rather than a rational review of the current provisions which have allowed such clearing to occur, the State government have completely removed the ability for responsible operators to carry out any vegetation clearing whereby valuable industries are directly impacted.

### **3. Items for Submission**

A number of serious issues take rise from the proposed amendments listed in the Bill.

As representatives of the Queensland agricultural industry, MSF Sugar strongly oppose the proposed legislative changes as it is considered that there are a number of alternative solutions available which would satisfy the States concerns, while also supporting the invaluable industry sectors for which Queensland's economy is based.

It is proposed that the strict removal of clearing exemptions and provisions be reconsidered based on the extensive impacts it will have across Queensland. As an alternative arrangement it is instead suggested that a more robust application and assessment process be implemented in order to ensure the validity and merit of developments which require the removal of vegetation such as agriculture.

### **4. Conclusion**

MSF Sugar Limited provides this submission against the *Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016* and requests that serious consideration is given to the broad and significant impacts that this legislation will have upon agricultural industries in Queensland.

As a stakeholder group which will be directly impacted by the proposed changes, we are willing to meet with and present further information to the Agriculture and Environment Committee so as to highlight our development intent across Queensland and explain how the Amendment Bill will directly result in the decline of any existing and/or future agricultural growth in Queensland.

Rather than completely removing the provisions which currently allow clearing of high value regrowth vegetation to occur for a 'relevant purpose', it is suggested that more stringent merit based applications and assessment processes be implemented which would address the Governments concern for widespread clearing and would ensure a higher industry standard is met in order to carry out such developments without completely impeding upon the agricultural industry.

We trust this information is sufficient for your purposes, however should you require any further details or clarification, please do not hesitate to contact the writer by telephone.

Yours sincerely

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**Hywel Cook** General Manager – Business Development