

SUBMISSION TO:**Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation
Amendment Bill 2016****SUBMISSION COVER SHEET****Closing date for submissions is 25 April 2016.**

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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 many 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.

I am a hobby farmer with a small property of 85ha that provides grazing for 70-80 head of beef cattle. My vision was to improve the property and manage the land in an environmentally responsible way, removing weeds and establishing pastures to provide forage for stock and increase ground cover for soil protection. I am totally opposed to continued uncertainty and attacks on the credibility of myself and other responsible farmers that threaten the viability and the long-term sustainability of my business and that of fellow farmers.

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

<p>The removal of High Value Agriculture (HVA) and irrigated HVA (IHVA) will have minimal effect on my property at the present time. I have most of my land under pasture and a licence for only a small area of irrigation. However if cropping or irrigation was to be undertaken in the future then under the proposed legislation any land with native vegetation or regrowth would not be available. The most likely outcome would be that land less suited in terms of soil, slope and proximity to infrastructure would be used which would result in operational inefficiencies, increased costs and potentially severe degradation. Removal of any potential for future development or simply to adjust land use to meet changing needs would decrease the value of the land.</p>
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<p>On a broader scale as demand for irrigation and cropping increases the value of land already being used will increase and other land well suited but with native vegetation will decrease. In fact one wonders how the very successful irrigation schemes (Burdekin, Emerald and southern Q) could have been progressed if this regulation was in place.</p>

<p>The removal of HVA and IHVA also seems to be in direct conflict with the Australian Government White Paper on the Development of Northern Australia. Using relatively small areas of land for grain or forage cropping or irrigation provides opportunity for farmers to stabilise production and income under highly variable climatic and market conditions.</p>

2. Re-introducing Reverse Onus-of-Proof
<p>The inclusion of Reverse Onus of Proof in Queensland Government's Vegetation Management Framework seems very harsh given the number of changes that have been made. Mapping has not always been accurate and while information on vegetation management is available it is often conflicting and not easy to interpret and apply at the individual property level.</p>
3. That no compensation will be payable to HVA, IHVA and Property Map of Assessable Vegetation (PMAV) applicants during transitional arrangements
<p>The proposal that compensation will not be available for HVA, IHVA or PMAV applicants during the Bill transition period seems to penalise those who were positioning for applications and they will at best delay their decisions and at worst terminate all plans.</p> <p>Compensation in the longer term is a major issue. The impact of the proposed changes could be very high depending on what limitations or restrictions are put in place.</p> <p>My particular concern is in relation to proposed category C containing endangered regional ecosystems. In one block of about 28ha most of the area is now mapped in this category and in the other block of about 56ha some 50% is mapped in this category. I don't believe this is good mapping but at this time I don't know what I have to do to correct the inaccuracies or what limitations or restrictions will be placed on these areas. This unprofessional and somewhat threatening approach that seems to put the onus on the landholder is very stressful. At best I expect it will take considerable time and effort on my part to deal with these issues in consultation with officers of the Department of Natural Resources.</p>
4. Including High Value Regrowth as an additional layer of regulation under the Vegetation Management Framework on leasehold, freehold and indigenous land
<p>This change has a potentially high impact on me and my property. The properties were used for dairying and small crop production for many years but from the mid 1970's some areas have not been cleared of regrowth.</p> <p>Unfortunately the predominant species is camphor laurel (<i>Cinnamomum camphora</i>). This is a highly invasive tree that competes with all other vegetation. Large native trees are overgrown and regeneration of any plants other than camphor laurel is limited. The eco-system is certainly not natural because of the modification/disruption and is I believe not functioning with weed invasion, limited native flora and fauna, bare soil and erosion. Of the native species wattles (<i>Acacia spp</i>) and <i>Alphitonia petriei</i> are the most common associated regrowth species.</p> <p>Associated weeds are lantana (<i>Lantana camara</i>), easter cassia (<i>Senna pendula</i>), wild tobacco tree (<i>Solanum mauritianum</i>), groundsel bush (<i>Baccharis halimifolia</i>), Chinese privet (<i>Ligustrum sinense</i>), Tree privet (<i>Ligustrum lucidum</i>) and to a lesser extent Ochna (<i>Ochna serrulata</i>), Broadleaved pepper tree (<i>Schinus terebinthifolia</i>) and umbrella tree (<i>Schefflera actinophylla</i>). Ground cover (grasses and forbs) is very minimal under these trees and weeds.</p>

Since 2005 when we took over management of the properties a program to remove camphor laurel has been undertaken. This is a very expensive operation that involves cutting camphor laurel and removing it with machinery but it needs to be continued as soon as possible before the native trees are overtaken and die. Areas of remnant vegetation with a range of native trees have been retained and are being managed to prevent invasion of weed species. Vegetation (including camphor laurel) along creeks is being retained and in some areas replanting has been undertaken. Other areas of what I consider higher value remnant and regrowth vegetation has been fenced to exclude livestock.

Pasture species well suited to the local climate and soils are being planted and managed in accordance with BMP (Best management practice). The species being planted are Rhodes grass (*Chloris gayana* cv. Callide), creeping bluegrass (*Bothriochloa insculpta* cv. Bisset) and panic (*Megathus maximus* cv. Gatton), creeping verna (*Vigna parkeri* cv. Shaw) and villomix (*Aeschynomene villosa* cv. Reid and Kretchmer). Setaria (*Setaria sphacelata*) and signal grass (*Brachiaria decumbens*) are regenerating from soil seed. These pastures are providing excellent grazing and ground cover. Soil organic matter is increasing which suggests that more carbon is being requested than under the previous vegetation.

Isolated plants of Giant rat's tail grass (*Sporobolus pyramidalis*, *S. natalensis*) and other weedy sporobolus grasses (*S. fertilis* and *S. africanus*) are present and are an increasing threat from infected nearby properties, Noosa trails and roadsides. Access is needed to check on a regular basis. Control and containment has been effective by way of regular inspections (every 2-3 weeks) and removal and treatment. For this to be continued and remain effective access to the areas is necessary and the proposed changes to the act in respect to regrowth could make this difficult.

I have not applied for a PMAV because I have no plans to clear native vegetation and a map therefore seemed to not be relevant. The proposed changes to the legislation could unfortunately put me in a very different and difficult position in respect to my land management. Any legislation that restricts our capacity to continue with this program would heavily impact on us.

My concern is that these areas of regrowth would have to be intensively managed, and I am uncertain of what plans are in place for this to happen otherwise in 25 years' time they will be camphor laurel thickets exactly the same as those we are cutting and removing now.

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.

This increase in Category R provisions seems to be in conflict with efforts to develop agriculture in northern Queensland. While leaving some trees may be part of the solution to reducing sediment and leaching into waterways unmanaged regrowth is likely to reduce ground cover and may add to the problem.

Signed:	RL Clem
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Date:	24 April 2016