

**SUBMISSION TO:**  
**Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation  
Amendment Bill 2016**

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Is all or part of your submission confidential?    Yes, all ☐    Yes, part ☐    No ☐    ☒ (copy box to indicate answer)

If part, please identify which sections are confidential:

Reason for confidentiality:

The following submission is provided on behalf of the Gilbert River Agricultural Precinct (GRAP) group, consisting of numerous properties located on the Gilbert River to the west of Georgetown North Queensland. The GRAP group was formed to help drive development in irrigated and dry land farming within the region, with development in the area supported by the vast majority of the group.

Numerous reports and studies have long identified the GRAP area as having potential for irrigated and dry land farming development. Estimates of potentially in excess of \$60,000,000.00 in gross margins could be produced within the area with up to 65,000 ha under irrigation (Flinders and Gilbert Agricultural Resource Assessment – CSIRO, 2015 ; Gilbert River Irrigation Area Investment Report, Gulf Savannah Development, 2009) . The Gilbert River Precinct alone could lift the total irrigated area of Northern Australia by approximately 15% (FGARA, 2015). Further to this the vast majority of land identified in the above reports was mapped by the Queensland State Government (DNR) allowing the now Department of Environment and Resource Management to produce land suitability mapping specifically for HVA and IHVA clearing permits.

#### Continuity of Current Vegetation Management Legislation

- The continuation of the current Vegetation Management Act must be kept in place and not changed in any way. The proposed changes in the Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 should be simply rejected.
  - Constant changes of this legislation severely impacts property manager's ability to make long term sustainable business decisions in relation to their investment and growth. This hampers property owners from further investing in their assets to enhance productivity and create new jobs in regional areas.
  - With the release of the Federal Governments White paper into Northern Development and the 5 billion dollar Federal Governments Northern Australia Development Fund Queensland risks losing trade and investment opportunities due to the uncertainty around this legislation. Furthermore areas such as GRAP that have good quality agricultural soil, potential large scale water storages and have no impact on the Great Barrier Reef would be severely hampered in attracting investment without HVA and IHVA permits over a critical mass of area.
- Consideration should be made to have areas such as the Green Hills Dam proposal and adjacent cropping land identified in the Gilbert River Irrigation Area Investment Report and FGARA maintain their ability to develop land under the current laws. Failing this, areas such as GRAP should be allowed to continue to apply for HVA and IHVA and continue clearing under other legislation or exemptions from the new proposed bill. This could include but is not limited to options such as declaring highly concentrated areas of suitable soil and water storage options as Projects of State Significance. This allows enough area to be cleared in a sustainable manner whilst providing the opportunity for long term investment and job creation in the region.

## Removal of High Value Agriculture and Irrigated High Value Agriculture from the Vegetation Management Frame Work

- HVA and IHVA clearing permits allow GRAP members the opportunity to diversify income streams to help buffer against catastrophic incidences such as the cessation of the live cattle trade in 2011 and the ability to better manage drought situations. These Permits allow for a more resilient industry to be developed in the area and also provide an economic boost to the Etheridge shire and state of Queensland. Rescinding these permits will lead to any potential productivity gains and job creation with the GRAP area through HVA or IHVA being lost.
  - Many GRAP members already produce fodder, grain, Mango's and other small dry land and irrigated crops within the area.
- The elimination of HVA and IHVA permits when the State Government could be potentially releasing in excess of 467,000 ml of water in the Gilbert River Catchment later this year could potentially stifle the ability of local producers to tender on this water or hinder the ability of large scale investors to invest in irrigated agriculture infrastructure in the region. This would deny local property owners, shire residents and indigenous people the economic opportunities that would come with increased development. Furthermore it would go against recent federal trends to see northern agricultural development (Northern Australia White Paper). We would prefer to see a sustainable mosaic style irrigated development as was identified by the CSIRO in the FGARA report.
- Timber thickening is also a major concern. Any removal or hindrances to HVA, IHVA permits and / or self-assessable codes will see a corresponding decrease in productivity of land and thus sustainability of the beef industry.

## Reverse Onus of Proof

- First and foremost the Queensland government should indemnify property owners for mistakes made within the government agencies such as incorrect mapping of vegetation and especially for permitted clearing and PMAV boundaries.
- If it is acceptable by the Queensland State Government for farmers to be guilty until proven innocent unlike any other criminal in the state that is innocent until proven guilty. Then perhaps the Government should show more leadership on the issue by holding itself to the same standards. Remove parliamentary privilege and any time any accusation is brought against a parliamentary member they should also be denied common justice and be treated as guilty of that accusation. If it's good enough for primary producers to be treated in this way it should also be acceptable to the Government to be held to the same standards it holds its constituents.

## PMAV Applications

- Clearing land for HVA and IHVA is not a cheap exercise. Numerous property owners that have invested large sums of money clearing land under currently valid permits I would

assume had the intention of applying for updated PMAV's after completion of clearing activities. As the government has stopped accepting PMAV applications from primary producers many have invested in developing their land without the ability to lock that clearing development in. Any areas that have cleared land under a HVA or IHVA with a legal permit should automatically have that land transferred into category x on their PMAV.

#### Compensation

- Fair and equitable compensation should be offered to any land holder that is disadvantaged under the proposed changes in the Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016. Primary producers should not be used as a whipping boy for governments to meet carbon emission targets. All Queenslanders should play their part in bearing the cost for reducing carbon emissions.

Yours sincerely,

A black rectangular box redacting the signature of the sender.

Brendan Fry

Chair – Gilbert River Agricultural Precinct