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27 April 2016

Research Director  
Agriculture and Environment Committee  
Parliament House  
BRISBANE QLD 4000  
vminquiry@parliament.qld.gov.au

Submission to the Agriculture and Environment Committee

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

Thank you for the opportunity to present a counterview to Agforce General President, Grant Maudsley's concerns regarding these "disastrous new laws". Grant's concerns, as outlined in the introduction to his e-petition opposing the bill are:

**1. The laws will restrict supply**

I assume that Agforce is referring to the supply of farmable land. This is true, but in doing so the laws will increase supply of land for other important and productive uses including animal habitats, carbon sequestration and riparian areas. Also, the majority of land suitable for high-value agriculture has already been cleared with any remaining land marginal at best.

**2. The laws will drive up food prices**

ABS data shows that the introduction of similar land clearing laws in 2007 did not coincide with a rapid increase in food prices in Australia, nor did their removal in 2013 correspond with a price decrease. The only food product in Australia that experienced a significant price decrease was milk from 2011. The price of food is a function of many inputs as described in Agforce's submission to the ACCC Grocery inquiry (2008) in which they explain how fuel and energy costs, labour costs and other inputs are more important than the price of wheat in producing a loaf of bread.

**3. The laws will stifle development and cost jobs**

Agforce have made similar claims about anticipated job losses prior to the introduction of land clearing laws previously, however each time the laws are changed they fail to collect evidence to support this – their job loss claims are baseless. It could even be argued that the additional staff required to ensure compliance with the new laws might increase jobs.

- 4. The laws re-introduce the reverse onus of proof and takes away the 'mistake of fact' defence, meaning farmers are presumed guilty until proven innocent, relegating them to a level below most criminals.**

Ignorance of the law is never a compelling defence, nor is it likely that a third party might maliciously undertake tree clearing without the landholder's knowledge. If a car were borrowed and driven through a red light camera, it is no defence to claim the driver thought red meant go, nor is it the responsibility of the police to prove who was driving.

- 5. Farmers work hard to ensure they manage their land sustainably and they need security and certainty for investment. These laws take away that certainty and economic security.**

The law does not impact farmers who manage their land sustainably as none of the practices it prevents could be considered sustainable, including:

- large-scale clearing of remnant woodlands via "high value" agriculture permits
- clearing trees next to riverbanks
- clearing ecologically important regrowing woodlands.

In my opinion, anyone who supports sustainable land management practices would have to question a system that allows the clearing of 58,000 hectares of woodland within about 6 months using bulldozers and chains as occurred in Strathmore last year.

Providing certainty only appears to be an issue when Agforce is an opponent of the changes. This current bill and the uncertainty associated with it is a direct result of changes supported by Agforce's in 2013.

Agforce's fierce opposition to this bill appears to be ideologically driven with no credible evidence that land clearing legislation in its current form provides anything other than small, short term gains to a few at irreversible long term cost to the environment and Queensland's future.

I hope that the committee will join me in supporting the Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016.

Yours sincerely

