



Submission on
the
Strategic Cropping
Land Bill 2011

November 2011

About Growcom

Growcom is the peak representative body for the fruit and vegetable growing industry in Queensland, providing a range of advocacy, research and industry development services. We are the only organisation in Australia to deliver services across the entire horticulture industry to businesses and organisations of all commodities, sizes and regions, as well as to associated industries in the supply chain. We are constantly in contact with growers and other horticultural business operators. As a result, we are well aware of the outlook, expectations and practical needs of our industry.

The organisation was established in 1923 as a statutory body to represent and provide services to the fruit and vegetable growing industry. As a voluntary organisation since 2003, Growcom now has grower members throughout the state and works alongside other industry organisations, local producer associations and corporate members. To provide services and networks to growers, Growcom has about thirty staff located in Brisbane, Bundaberg, Townsville, Toowoomba and Tully. We are a member of a number of state and national industry organisations and use these networks to promote our members' interests and to work on issues of common interest.

Growcom welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the Strategic Cropping Land Bill 2011. The comments below should be read in conjunction with the attached submission from Queensland Farmers Federation, of which Growcom is a member. Growcom strongly supports the QFF submission and would like to add additional emphasis to the following points.

The protection of Strategic Cropping Land is vitally important if Queensland is to play its role in feeding a rapidly expanding world population, in addition to ensuring our own population has access to the full range of fresh food that makes up a nutritional diet.

Horticulture is an intensive industry, and does not require the large expanses of land that other commodities do to make production viable. Therefore, we recommend that there be no minimum property size included in this Bill.

Growcom is concerned that the effects of development which will impact people beyond the immediate development area have not been considered. Water in particular is crucial to successful cropping, and damage caused to underground water supplies can adversely affect cropping in a whole district.

The requirement for a property to have been cropped three times in the last 12 years to be considered as SCL is concerning. Good quality cropping land does not cease to be so just because it isn't cropped. Natural disasters, low market prices, and labour availability are just three reasons that a property may have not been cropped three times in twelve years. To maintain and/or increase output, land that would be capable of growing crops should also be considered as SCL. With the right inputs – water in particular – there is a considerable amount of land that could be cropped. Growcom is aware of land which was formerly cropped that is now grazed due to changed rain patterns. Were irrigation to be introduced in this area, it could again be cropped.

Growcom would like to particularly underline concerns raised in the QFF submission regarding Mitigation. Restoration of cropping land to its original productive state is not something that has ever successfully been undertaken, therefore we question the whole concept of mitigation as it is defined in this Bill. The proposed mitigation fund to be administered by the Government is unlikely to have any real effect, since once good quality agriculture land is gone, it cannot be replicated. This ultimately means a reduction in the total amount of cropping land in Queensland – something this Bill is designed to prevent. The administration of the fund is vague and its ability to mitigate damaged land is highly questionable.