

**AgForce Queensland Farmers Limited**

ABN 57 611 736 700

Second Floor, 110 Mary Street, Brisbane, Qld, 4000
PO Box 13186, North Bank Plaza, cnr Ann & George Sts, Brisbane Qld 4003Ph: (07) 3236 3100
Fax: (07) 3236 3077
Email: agforce@agforceqld.org.au
Web: www.agforceqld.org.au

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Committee Secretary
Economics and Governance Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000By Email: egc@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary

Re: AgForce Submission to Debt Reduction & Savings Bill 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the Debt Reductions & Savings Bill 2021 (the Bill) which is currently before the Committee for consideration.

AgForce is a peak organisation representing Queensland's cane, cattle, grain, and sheep & wool producers. The cane, beef, grain, sheep & wool industries in Queensland generated around \$7.3 billion in on-farm value of production in 2018-19. AgForce's purpose is to advance sustainable agribusiness and strives to ensure the long-term growth, viability, competitiveness and profitability of these industries. Almost 5,900 farmers, individuals and businesses provide support to AgForce through membership. Queensland producers provide high-quality food and fibre to Australian and overseas consumers, and contribute significantly to the social fabric of regional, rural and remote communities.

Titles Registry

At the heart of a successful agricultural business are secure rights to access the necessary natural capital, including land and water. Many of these rights are currently managed by the Queensland Titles Registry, which the Bill proposes to transfer and outsource.

Historically, tenure has been a complex issue for AgForce and its members since the initial granting of leasehold blocks during colonisation. Even today, most of these leasehold arrangements continue – with approximately 60% of Queensland still owned by the State and leased for primary production. Many Bills and reform have attempted to modernise and amend the conditions upon these leases over time, the result being an incredibly complex web of tenure arrangements and conditions which affect each lease uniquely and need to be captured and recorded reliably. For these reasons, the Bill's proposal to outsource the Queensland Titles Registry is of significant concern to these lessees.

The last Parliamentary Committee to consider the vast complexity of Queensland's leasehold estate noted:

Clearly, with so many stakeholders potentially affected by the operation of the land tenure system, there are many compelling reasons why sound land tenure arrangements are beneficial to the State of Queensland. For example, it:

- *Guarantees ownership and security of tenure*
- *Provides the basis for land and property taxation*
- *Provide security for credit*

ADVANCING SUSTAINABLE AGRIBUSINESS

- *Guarantees the result of judicial procedures relating to land rights including rights of repossession of land*
- *Reduces land disputes*
- *Develops and monitors land and mortgage markets*
- *Protects State lands*
- *Facilitates land reform*
- *Promotes improvement of land and buildings*
- *Facilitates reliable land use records*
- *Improves urban planning and infrastructure development*
- *Supports environmental management*
- *Produces statistical data as a base for social and economic development.*¹

With these leasehold arrangements, plus other very valuable agricultural assets such as water allocations and survey plans stored in and managed by the Titles Registry, it is justifiable that AgForce is concerned with any moves to alter long-standing and proven management arrangements. Compounding this concern is that whilst freehold land is protected under the Torrens system which establishes title to land by registration and conveyance by instrument and in so doing confers upon a bona fide purchaser an indefeasible right to the land, leasehold land does enjoy this benefit.

While we appreciate that other States may have embarked upon this move to transfer the Registry for budgetary savings, we believe the stated quantum of those savings are minimal when considered in light of the significant value of the assets that sit within the Registrar. The risks of outsourcing are difficult to articulate and foresee however, we believe that these secure title arrangements are so important to the Queensland economy that these should be directly managed by the government as a public service. We also hold concern about what will happen over time as the commercial imperative to shareholders will increasingly drive decision making in this area, potentially over the interests of the public good.

Given the significant abovementioned concerns, we cannot endorse the proposal to transfer the Titles Registry.

Abolishment of Queensland Productivity Commission

AgForce also holds concern about the Bill's proposal to abolish the Queensland Productivity Commission (PC) and Office of Best Practice Regulation (OBPR) and integrate its functions into Queensland Treasury and the Queensland Competition Authority. Independence is critical to the success of both the PC and highly successful OBPR which have worked without fear in assessing and providing scrutiny on Queensland legislation on behalf of Queensland, including particularly on issues such as vegetation management in Queensland and regulation of our sector. The Bill's proposal to abolish and reform these agencies under Treasury will hamper their ability to undertake independent review and provide frank advice to Government – and in doing so, provide transparency.

For any questions on this submission please contact Policy Specialist Lauren Hewitt on (07) [REDACTED] or via email [REDACTED].

Yours faithfully



Michael Guerin
Chief Executive Officer

¹ State Development, Infrastructure and Industry Committee (2013) Final report: Inquiry into the Future and Continued Relevance of Government Land Tenure across Queensland. Online at <https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/documents/committees/SDIIC/2012/01-Government-land-tenure/rpt-025-31May2013.pdf> at p5