








**SUBMISSION TO:**  
**Acting Committee Secretary**  
**Innovation, Tourism Development and Environment Committee**  
**Parliament House, George St, Brisbane, QLD 4000**  
**(Reef Protection Bill 2019) – Submission Date 12.3.19**

Organisation or individual:	RH & RJ Simmons		
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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:

Dear Acting Committee Secretary, Innovation, Tourism Development and Environment Committee,

As a beef producer and landholder, with land in the Burdekin and Fitzroy River Catchments, it is with disbelief that 12 months after writing a submission opposing the changes to the Vegetation Management Act, I find myself once again having to write a submission concerning more proposed legislation that will have a detrimental, far reaching impact on agriculture and associated industries.

The fact that the Queensland Government introduced the Environmental Protection (Great Barrier Reef Protection Measures and Other Legislation Bill 2019) into Parliament on 27 February 2019 is unbelievable. At the time the Reef Protection Bill was introduced most landholders were either crippled by the aftermath of flooding rains, associated stock losses and damage to property or dealing with one of the worst droughts in Queensland's history.

We strongly oppose the proposed Reef Protection Bill for a number of reasons as outlined below.

As landholders in the Reef Catchments we were unaware that increased regulations were being proposed for graziers and grain growers in Reef Catchments. We pay land rent and land rates, we abide by the conditions of our lease yet proposed legislation was introduced into parliament without our knowledge. This shows extremely poor communication by the Government. To introduce the proposed legislation without our knowledge was unfair but to allow such a short time for affected parties to write a submission is unjust. The fact that the timeframe is short with submissions due on 15<sup>th</sup> March, has meant that my submission is also brief. We have not been given enough time to provide details of the detrimental impact the proposed legislation will have on us and so many associated agricultural businesses. At this stage, we have not seen proposed minimum practice standards. This also shows a lack of consultation and disrespect for us and our industry.

As environmentally aware landholders, it is in our best interests to be custodians of the land. We have two sons that have chosen to make their future on the land. Our interest in our land is generational, not political. We do not believe that making grazing and cropping a prescribed Environmentally Relevant Activity (ERA) is the best way to safeguard the Great Barrier Reef for future generations. Voluntary self-regulation and implementation of best practice would be a more effective solution than regulation. Land holders and the Government need to work together to formulate an environmentally sustainable way to safeguard the future of food production and the Great Barrier Reef. In many cases, the Government's desktop knowledge and administration, results in detrimental land management. This could be overcome if regulation was replaced by consultation.

If grazing and cropping were to become ERAs, the associated costs are of concern. Our industry is suffering and to make grazing and cropping an ERA would most likely mean that we will be charged annual fees. ERAs generally require approval under the Planning Act which would have huge cost implications for producers without necessarily benefiting the Great Barrier Reef. This Bill will commit the



agricultural industry including farm machinery dealerships, agronomists, suppliers of chemicals and fertilisers etc to a licence to operate which will stifle innovative practices with no real, beneficial outcomes for the Great Barrier Reef. It appears that the legislation has a political agenda not an environmental one with the ultimate goal to reduce our rights and make agriculture unviable.

The Reef Catchment areas in Queensland are generally also resource rich areas with intensive mining activities. Why does the Proposed Reef Protection Bill allow no agricultural offsets? This seems unfair and unjust when offsets apply to new urban developments, resource and industrial activities, sewerage works etc which are releasing sediment or nutrient. Why are there two sets of rules and once again agricultural is paying the ultimate price. On the 22 February 2019, only five days before this legislation was introduced into parliament an article was published by INDEPENDENT.CO.UK stating that "Australia approves dumping of 1 million tons of sludge near Great Barrier Reef". Apparently sludge dumping in the area is largely illegal but a "loophole in the ban" does not cover the discarding of waste created during port maintenance. A permit was issued by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority to allow sludge from Hay Point to be dumped with "some temporary short term impacts to habitat possible" in protected areas including the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and sensitive habitats. How is this possible? The Government wants to tighten laws in an attempt to reduce sediment runoff, at considerable cost to agriculture, yet they allow the dumping of sludge near the Great Barrier Reef.

It is of grave concern that the Government has assumed that they will have access to sensitive producer information contained in the BMP programs, as an alternative pathway to meet minimum practice standards. This not only jeopardises industry ownership of BMP programs but it highlights the fact that the Reef Protection Bill is an ultimate contravention of our privacy.

The Reef Protection Bill is exponentially deleterious for agriculture. The Bill will make it increasingly difficult for producers to do what they do best – produce some of the cleanest, greenest, freshest, best quality produce in the world in an environmentally sustainable way. This will be jeopardised if increased restrictions are imposed on farmers. If new cropping areas require a licence, farm design plan and on site assessment for soil suitability the associated costs will make the development of such areas inefficient and unviable. In a world faced with concerns over future food supply, restricting production is unfathomable.

The proposed penalties of \$217,000 per offence for knowingly contravening regulations and \$78,000 for other offences are excessive and unreasonable. The Bill will allow the Government to enforce actions on private landholders that they have no intention of complying with themselves. An example of this would be road construction through private property by a local or government authority. The road may have been built in such a way that it causes erosion on the adjoining, privately owned land. Under the proposed legislation the degradation of land would be regarded as an offence with penalties able to be imposed on the landholder. The land may be degraded to a C or D condition through no fault of the landholder yet the landholder is held responsible. This is unjust, unfair and unreasonable and the associated fines will have a detrimental impact on the farm business.

I hope that in the preparation of this Submission I did not waste my valuable time, time that could have been used to help our business and our cattle survive through this relentless drought. If we are to be treated in the same way as we were last time with the Vegetation Management Laws Committee Submissions, (when we spent hours writing a submission, travelled 10 hours to Longreach with the cost of an overnight stay to speak at the Parliamentary Hearing), to then be told that the Committee reported that they did not hear any evidence to change their recommendation to Parliament for commending the Bill, then I have clearly wasted my time. The proposed Reef Protection Bill will make no difference to water quality on the Great Barrier Reef. The legislation will not reduce sediment runoff, it will erode the basic rights of the agricultural industry at a crippling cost. In order to improve water quality in the catchment areas there needs to be a practical solution not a political one. Instead of regulation the Government needs to implement a long term consultation process to work with the agricultural industry rather than against them. Moving forward, this is the only way that future food production can be achieved in an environmentally sustainability way that protects our valuable natural resources.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robyn Simmons".

Robyn Simmons