



**Gecko - Gold Coast and Hinterland Environment Council Assn Inc.**

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The Research Director  
State Development, Infrastructure and Industry Committee  
Parliament House  
George Street  
BRISBANE QLD 4000

per email to: SDIIC@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Sir

**Re: Submission to the *Qld Government Inquiry into the Future and Continued Relevance of Land Tenure across Queensland***

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission to the above enquiry. Gecko wishes to express the following comments on the issue of land tenure for consideration by the State Development, Infrastructure and Industry Committee (SDIIC).

Gecko notes that:

- approximately 65% of the State is under leasehold; thus the issues involved in land tenure conditions are highly significant
- leasehold land is a significant, high value State asset
- the vast majority of leasehold is for grazing
- many leasehold properties have high ecological value; many meet National Park criteria
- the hard-won Delbessie Agreement (or State Rural Leasehold Land Strategy) put in place after ten years of discussion among conservation, Indigenous, commercial, agricultural and government stakeholders, frames how grazing leases are renewed and the conditions attached, with a sound degree of emphasis on conservation principles and outcomes, recognition of Indigenous cultural needs, and scientific principles
- many leases came up for renewal in the 1990s and 2000s, and were subject to the tiered Delbessie Agreement; lease term tiers range from 20 years upward for areas above 100 hectares
- high conservation value leaseholds have already been earmarked for addition to the national estate under the Delbessie Agreement, with leaseholders fully informed of the eventual acquisition of the land and an approximate timeframe
- pastoralists see the value in ecological provisions of the Delbessie Agreement, recognizing that overstocking and degradation are crucial determinants of poor economic outcomes, which once established are difficult to reverse
- associated administrative issues for leaseholders have proven onerous

- there are many other leases besides pastoral leases, such as telecommunications, sporting and recreational, charity use
- issues surrounding land tenure in Queensland exist in larger contexts:
  - both the Federal and QLD Governments have acknowledged the 'rapid and serious decline of biodiversity' in Australia and Queensland
  - both the Federal and QLD Governments have recognised the catastrophic threats posed to human society and the natural world by anthropogenic climate change
  - Australian and global food security is under immense pressure with intense competition for land space among key nations
  - Australian water security is threatened by climate change, altered landscape features, domestic, industrial and resource extraction overuse
  - Maintaining the vast amount of land under leasehold represents a considerable cost to the State with little direct return
  - Political and partisan imperatives have tended to dominate decision making and perspectives on land use in QLD, while the greater good of conservation (for human and natural world needs) should be allowed to predominate.

In reviewing the present circumstances of land tenure in Queensland, Gecko requests that the SDIIC consider the following concerns:

1. Land tenure has been the subject of some concern among conservation agencies for several decades. The establishment of the Delbessie Agreement in the 1990s represented a significant gain for conservation outcomes despite there being considerable further stringencies which the involved parties (QCC, RCS, WWF, Indigenous groups, AgForce and the QLD Government) did not achieve. The three tiers of land tenure agreements under the Delbessie Agreement represent important constraints upon leaseholders, largely agriculturalists, ensuring mutually beneficial results for both commercial agricultural interests and ecological goals. The pastoralist representative body AgForce has recognised the critical, holistic importance of nurturing the biodiversity values of given leasehold allotments to preserve and restore the health of the land and ensure the ability to support flora and fauna if in turn agricultural interests are to be protected. Weed removal, vegetation protection and regeneration, riparian zone conservation, land stability, and soil health are just some factors identified by science and recognised by pastoralists and government bodies as crucial to land health. The significant achievement of the Delbessie Agreement is the formalization of this acknowledgement of the value of thriving native biodiversity and landscapes in assisting agricultural needs, with increasingly stringent conditional agreements attached to each tier of lease term. Gecko strongly asserts that the gains of the Delbessie Agreement must be recognised by the Qld Govt review as necessary to perpetuate, and that any amendments made to the lease term and its conditions only be strengthened in acknowledgement of the holistic interaction between the natural environment and a healthy pastoral sector, the decline of biodiversity throughout Queensland, and the potential dire threats of climate change to both the agricultural sector and native flora and fauna.
2. Queensland's proportion of conservation dedicated land was acknowledged to be below the national and global standard by the previous government which also made a commitment to increase the percentage. The present State Government has recently made decisions which dilute the integrity of existing conservation through changed policies on recreational uses of National Parks and State Forests. The Delbessie Agreement-based leasehold agreements as they presently

stand represent de facto conservation at a medium scale for the state which provide some balance at least for the low proportion of official conservation estate

3. The Lands Act views grazing as the primary activity of most leasehold land, which may be seen as conflicting with the aims of the Delbessie Agreement, which are primarily towards conservation: determining the condition of the land can be challenging when agricultural or conservation conditions are dichotomized. However, these apparently divergent conditions can be seen as overlapping with thoughtful consideration of wording and concepts.
4. The LNP Government is bound to this review by a pre-election commitment; Minister Seeney has already been quoted\* as wanting to give 'certainty' to development interests through reviewing land tenure. Gecko asserts that this statement should be clarified for all sections of the community to clearly understand where the LNP perspective lies on the issue of land tenure. (\*Please see news article attached.)
5. A well publicized pre-election promise of the LNP was to retain public assets; the sale of leasehold land would constitute a serious breaking of that promise.
6. Uncertainty also remains over whether foreign investors will be allowed purchase of leasehold land, at what proportion, or cost. At present, across Australia, foreign ownership of valuable food production land is a matter of considerable concern; the proportion and location of foreign land ownership lacks transparency since only large land area parcels are registered. With global food shortages already arising, and the very low proportion of suitable agricultural quality Australian land, Gecko emphasizes the need to limit foreign purchase of Queensland pastoral land.
7. Land use of on-sold leasehold land needs to be articulated. As already pointed out, Australian agricultural quality land is extremely limited, requiring that all effort be made by authorities to ensure that existing and potential farming land be preserved as such. In recognition of dire predictions for global food security attributable to multiple factors such as over-population and climate change, priority should be given by authorities to protecting Queensland's agricultural capacity over other development interests such as mining which appears so lucrative in the short term.
8. The proposed cost of leasehold land purchase has been rumoured to be much lower than the open market price; determining purchase cost of leasehold land requires consideration of a number of factors based on the economic, social and political considerations implicit in selling off a highly valuable State asset such as land.
9. Gecko is aware that the State Government must also consider whether it is in the State's interest to own this land given the cost of maintaining it. However, this does not justify selling off this valuable State asset when the alternative of conscientiously designed lease arrangements exists, benefiting landholders, the State Government's budgeting constraints and the need to preserve public assets and the utilization of those assets for the future.
10. The Carbon Farming Initiative under the Federal Clean Energy Futures Legislation and the establishment of a carbon price represent a significant income stream for landholders and the State Government, which must be pursued with enthusiasm and without political interest. At present, existing carbon sequestration income from native vegetation on leasehold land belongs to the State, while carbon rights from regeneration carried out by the leaseholder belong to them. This arrangement appears highly satisfactory since it encourages conservation and regeneration of the land, assisting agricultural quality, enriching biodiversity, participating in worldwide climate change mitigation efforts, keeping Queensland pastoralists in pace with burgeoning carbon trading markets, and giving leaseholders as well as the State Government valuable immediate and ongoing income. With so much at stake, Gecko advises that the carbon sequestration as income potential of

the present leasehold arrangements should be acknowledged and prioritized regardless of the party political imperatives which may drive this government to ignore or devalue the Carbon Farming Initiative.

Gecko is grateful for the opportunity to make this submission to the review committee and will await with interest the findings and recommendations which we trust will strive for the best long term interests of all Queenslanders in full recognition of the challenges of the present era.

Yours sincerely



Rose Adams  
Secretary

Extract from Queensland Country Life article by Mark Phelps 21 Jun, 2012

**Seeney orders Qld land tenure review**

BY MARK PHELPS

DEPUTY Premier Jeff Seeney has ordered a major parliamentary inquiry into Queensland land tenure system.

Speaking from Parliament on Tuesday, Mr Seeney said he was determined to ensure that leaseholders were given both security and certainty if they were to invest and build the economy and they needed to know their leases will be renewed.

Mr Seeney said the review was necessary to ensure development in the State, particularly in the far north and west where the majority of land is leasehold. It also had to address the fundamental issue of land ownership, land tenure and secure property rights, he said.

Mr Seeney questioned why the State owned so much land in Queensland, saying he strongly believed freehold tenure was the most effective title to provide certainty to land managers and to the best management of the land.

"In some cases leasehold land may need to be transitioned to freehold title, and if that's necessary this inquiry will indicate how we make that transition in a way that is fair to the people of Queensland and is fair to those willing to invest in development," Mr Seeney said.

"We need to develop a sensible freeholding mechanism that is fair to the state and fair to people who have been leaseholders for an extended term.

"Over generations, land has been leased out or title given to a whole range of people from pastoralists to tourist operators and indigenous communities.

"There is a mish-mash of government land titles that control the use of land and the use of that land by various parties.

"What was appropriate when leases were first introduced may not be appropriate now. So there is a need to conduct a review.

"The whole issue of government leasehold titles and how they operate in the current environment and what their futures should be is something the committee will look at and its findings will provide a basis for future government decisions."

Mr Seeney said he had determined to address the issue of land tenure since his very early days in politics.

"The previous Bligh Labor government had a concept that land leases were like inner-city apartments where at the end of the contract the lessee simply packed up and moved on," he said.

"Land leases were never meant to be like that. They were a form of land title and were grossly misrepresented by the Bligh and Beattie Governments.

"What we are setting out to do is to review the whole issue of state land - how it is managed, how it is leased to private landholders and how those arrangements affect the management of the land itself. Parliament's State Development, Infrastructure and Industry Committee chaired by Ted Malone (Mirani LNP) will carry out the inquiry throughout this year reporting to the Parliament by the end of November. The committee will take public submissions and consult with landholders, key industry groups, indigenous Queenslanders and relevant experts. Its findings will provide the basis for the LNP Government to make decisions about future land use and titles. "Secure property rights are essential for sound investment decisions and are a basic essential for State development," Mr Seeney said.