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

Dear Ms Pasley

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a **submission on the *State Development, Infrastructure and Planning (Red Tape Reduction) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2014*** (the Bill) for the consideration of the Committee.

AgForce is the peak lobby group representing the majority of beef, sheep and wool, and grain producers in Queensland. The broadacre beef, sheep and grains industries in Queensland generated around \$4.5 billion in gross farm-gate value of production in 2012/13. AgForce exists to ensure the long term growth, viability, competitiveness and profitability of these industries. Our members provide high quality food and fibre products to Australian and overseas consumers, manage more than 50 per cent of the Queensland landscape and contribute significantly to the social fabric of rural and remote communities.

The comments in this submission relate specifically to the proposed repeal of the *Wild Rivers Act 2005* within the Bill. AgForce supports the policy position of the Government to repeal the Act.

While sympathetic to the desire to see the natural values and unique character of the state's rivers protected, AgForce has a long standing opposition to the use of the Wild Rivers legislation due to the following reasons:

- The failure to acknowledge ecologically sustainable development as part of the Act's purpose. This means that social and economic outcomes are largely ignored for the sake of a purely conservation-based Act
- It places unfair restrictions on the long-term development options and future economic diversification by primary producers in declared areas
- It restricts the ability of landholders to adapt to climate change and market factors
- Better environmental outcomes can be achieved by alternative means
- It introduces constraints on best practice land management, including creating perverse pest and weed outcomes.

The *Wild Rivers Act 2005* mandates compliance within a further 13 Acts of Queensland legislation, placing onerous controls on development in the categories of forestry, vegetation management, overland flow, agriculture and animal husbandry. It adds to the burden of red tape by placing further, unnecessary restrictions on primary producers.

As a result we strongly support the Queensland Government's moves to wind back the Wild Rivers framework. There is a range of existing legislation that would ensure the desired conservation objectives are achieved in a more efficient manner and provide a more visible and transparent process for all stakeholders. These include the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*, *Environmental Protection Act 1994*, the *Sustainable Planning Act 2009* and the *Water Act 2000*.

Further, as the Department pointed out in their briefing on the Bill to the Committee, the Wild Rivers legislation has become redundant as a result of recent planning reforms which have integrated the objectives of the legislation. This includes the state interests outlined in the state planning policy, and the *Regional Planning Interests Act 2014*. This *Regional Planning Interests (RPI) Act 2014* provides for the identification of significant environmental areas within the state, through Regional Plans or in the supporting Regulation, and the regulation of agricultural activities that may have a significant impact on the natural values within these areas, also identified in the RPI Regulation. Indeed, broadacre cropping and water storages (dams) are identified under the RPI framework as unacceptable uses in certain 'designated precincts' within these strategic environmental areas, although such blanket outright prohibitions are not supported by AgForce when appropriate regulation of impacts could ensure further development is environmentally sustainable and natural values can be effectively protected.

AgForce has valued its representation on the Government's Western Rivers Advisory Panel (WRAP) that examined an alternative approach to the Wild Rivers declarations in the Lake Eyre Basin, and our representation on the Regional Planning Committee assisting the Government to develop a Regional Plan for Cape York Peninsula. The Parliamentary Committee is referred to our submissions within those processes for further information on our views relating to issues within those regions. AgForce would have liked to have had more consultation by the Department on the mapping of the Channel Country strategic environmental areas as the underlying rationale for the identification of these areas is unclear.

The socio-economic viability of landholders and local communities is important to sustainable environmental management. Ideally, economic, social and environmentally-balanced outcomes can be best pursued by emphasising voluntary, incentive-based mechanisms as an alternative to legislation wherever possible. An example of this voluntary, environmental stewardship approach is the Nature Refuges program. This method views local landholders as part of the solution to achieving sustainable environmental management rather than as part of the problem. Ironically, primary producer landholders in declared catchments have been largely responsible for the past land and river management that has resulted in these river catchments being viewed as having all, or almost all, of their natural values intact.

In protecting environmental values AgForce expects that delivering ecologically sustainable development would be mindful of the following elements:

- recognise voluntary landholder conservation activities and previous good land management practice
- enable producers to meet challenges including market forces, climate variability, and rising input costs through the adoption of new agricultural technologies or altered land uses and not impede development that reduces the overall pressure on significant environmental values
- take a negotiated partnership approach, enabling local level decision-making and providing positive incentives for adopting improved environmental practices
- minimise costs of compliance and maximise investment certainty for primary producers
- Consider inter-generational equity and future economic and social welfare and recognise and protect future development options that are as yet unexercised.

AgForce would like further clarification on the proposed amendments in the Bill on page 151 to the Water Resource (Great Artesian Basin) Plan 2006 relating to projects of regional significance and specifically if these amendments amount to a reduction in the scrutiny of matters that need to be considered by the Co-ordinator General or Chief Executive.

In conclusion, AgForce supports the Queensland Government's moves to revoke the *Wild Rivers Act 2005*. For more information or queries relating to this submission please contact Dr Dale Miller, Senior Policy Advisor, on 07 32363100 or email [\[REDACTED\]](#)

Yours sincerely



Ian Burnett
General President
AgForce Queensland