



SUBMISSION RE THE NEED TO AMEND THE VEGETATION MANAGEMENT ACT

[REDACTED]
G Muirhead

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9th April 2013

State Development and Infrastructure Committee

Parliament House

Brisbane QLD 4000

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RE The recent State Government Initiative to amend the vegetation management Act and its effect on rural production:

Efforts by Ag Force and now the State government to amend the Vegetation Management Act has to be applauded as the way it currently stands is highly limiting to the agronomic potential of Queensland. Without significant changes, the idea of doubling Agricultural Potential proposed by the State Government would not be feasible.

AN EXAMPLE OF THE ISSUES INVOLVED:

I would like to submit an example our property "Rangeview Station" on the Bruce Highway, St Lawrence, in the coastal higher rainfall belt (1250mm) approximately 130kms South of Mackay, this being 18kms south of an established cane growing area. In its current form with only 1000 hectares of a 3600 hectare parcel in the white zone, there is approximately 1500 hectares of available land which is currently timbered with native vegetation but is suitable for clearing and represents some of the better soil types and drained areas on the property. Were this cleared it would still leave approximately 1000 hectares of Native bush (a large part of this is on Lot 14 MC460 not shown on the enclosed map-1410 hectares).

The land suggested requiring clearing is interspersed amongst the cultivation/cleared country and has a major infestation of Giant Rats tail grass, Lantana and other invasive weeds throughout which cannot be effectively and economically managed in its current state. In addition, regardless of efforts to control these weeds the uncleared area forms a seed bank which further infests adjoining cleared areas. In fact the pattern of the non-cleared areas makes management of crops and cattle economically unfeasible with little to no productive value. (see attached map- orange zone showing areas under discussion)

The property some years ago was successfully growing cane and a substantial banana plantation and lends itself to irrigation from abundant surface and ground water and could support horticultural or specialist crops if the alterations mentioned were able to be undertaken.

This 1500 hectares of suggested clearing, happens to be the better drained areas as the wetter flats were cleared by previous owners before the laws were brought in limiting development for ponded pastures by banking overland flows. However these too are no longer encouraged. Since then the recent spread of Giant Rats tail grass, created the current problems and made it impossible to manage effectively. This meant the productive capacity from a cattle point of view as well as higher value cropping is dramatically reduced.

As this is high rainfall country the potential to grow cash crops including sugar cane, tree crops, corn and soybeans as well as *Pongamia pinnata*, an oil seed producing leguminous tree native to Australia, and intensive cattle grazing with the introduction of Pangola and other high value pastures or forage crops as well as the introduction of management practices for the improvement of soil structure. This has the potential to convert this land into a highly productive mixed agricultural enterprise. Our particular interest is to replace the trees on portion of this land with *Pongamia pinnata* as mentioned, which will assist in increasing soil nitrogen as well as provide shelter woods.

Further, these uncleared areas interspersed with the white zone areas and waterways are ferral pig harbours further exacerbating the difficulty in growing crops on the cleared areas and effectively managing weeds and cattle production due to the resultant high losses from pig damage. We have noted, since taking over the property in October 2011, that there has been considerable erosion over the previous recent period adjacent to the watercourses where they run through the uncleared areas. These are difficult to rectify as the trees keep the areas bear of grasses even in high rainfall periods as has been the case for the last 2 years. With the introduction of clearing these areas could be grassed up thereby holding the the soil together in intense rainfall periods reducing erosion. Further remedial action would also be then possible

A further issue, experienced firsthand since there were a number of cattle left on the place when it was purchased: Attempts to muster the property of these cattle have proven very difficult. The cattle have not been able to be mustered even with choppers (has been tried 3 times) due to the dense lantana and invasive weeds, water courses as well as difficulties in transit through the areas. The cattle have gone wild due to lack of handling. Experienced cattlemen have failed using horses, dogs and all other conventional means including trapping. Traversing some of this uncleared country is difficult also due to the fact of the high ferral pig infestation and their churning up the soil, making traversing with horses and vehicles quite dangerous and almost impossible(Picture 3) . Conventional control methods have not been successful in reducing ferral pig numbers because of these access difficulties.

We have commenced a program of fencing off waterways in the hope of better managing the stock but the patchwork of uncleared land is a real management and production issue. Included is a map to give an idea of the layout issues involved. Orange line outlines the areas that could be cleared to enable weed management, erosion control, cropping or cattle grazing and ferral pig management around the existing white zone areas.

Fire risk management would also be enhanced. The build-up of Ratstail (up to 30 t/hectare/year in the wet season) can represent a very significant fire risk going into the drier months.

There is approximately 1000 hectares that we would not seek to clear as indicated, on the North East section of the property. This maintains a substantial amount of native timber and wildlife area

This property represents just one example of the high loss of productivity caused by the constraints of the existing Vegetation Management Act and of the need to address these issues across Queensland. Were the properties able to be developed as indicated, the effect on producing a viable enterprise and enabling proper weed, erosion, fire and pest control would be dramatic whilst still retaining an excellent balance of ecological outcomes both in the form of natural vegetation retained over about 1000 hectares and within the planted areas of *Pongamia pinnata*.

Sincerely

George Muirhead

PICTURES

1. Giant Rats Tail Grasses: no grazing value

2. Good stand of Pangola grass: excellent grazing

This extends through native forest areas.



3. Very typical ground profiles in timbered areas exposed after the very hot burn fire of dense Giant Rats Tail. Feral pigs have dug up the ground severely making transit with bikes, ATV's and Horses dangerous.



4. Developed highly productive agricultural land ready for planting after clearing commercial stand of Spotted Gum hardwood



5. Established Pongamia Planting at Elimbah QLD showing trees

Approximately 6 years old.



6. Newly planted Pongamia trial area



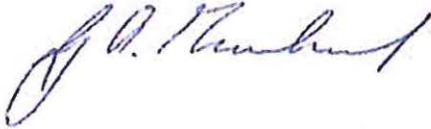
7. Examples of area of virgin rainforest escarpment and other native forest – showing part of the 1000hectares native forest to be retained



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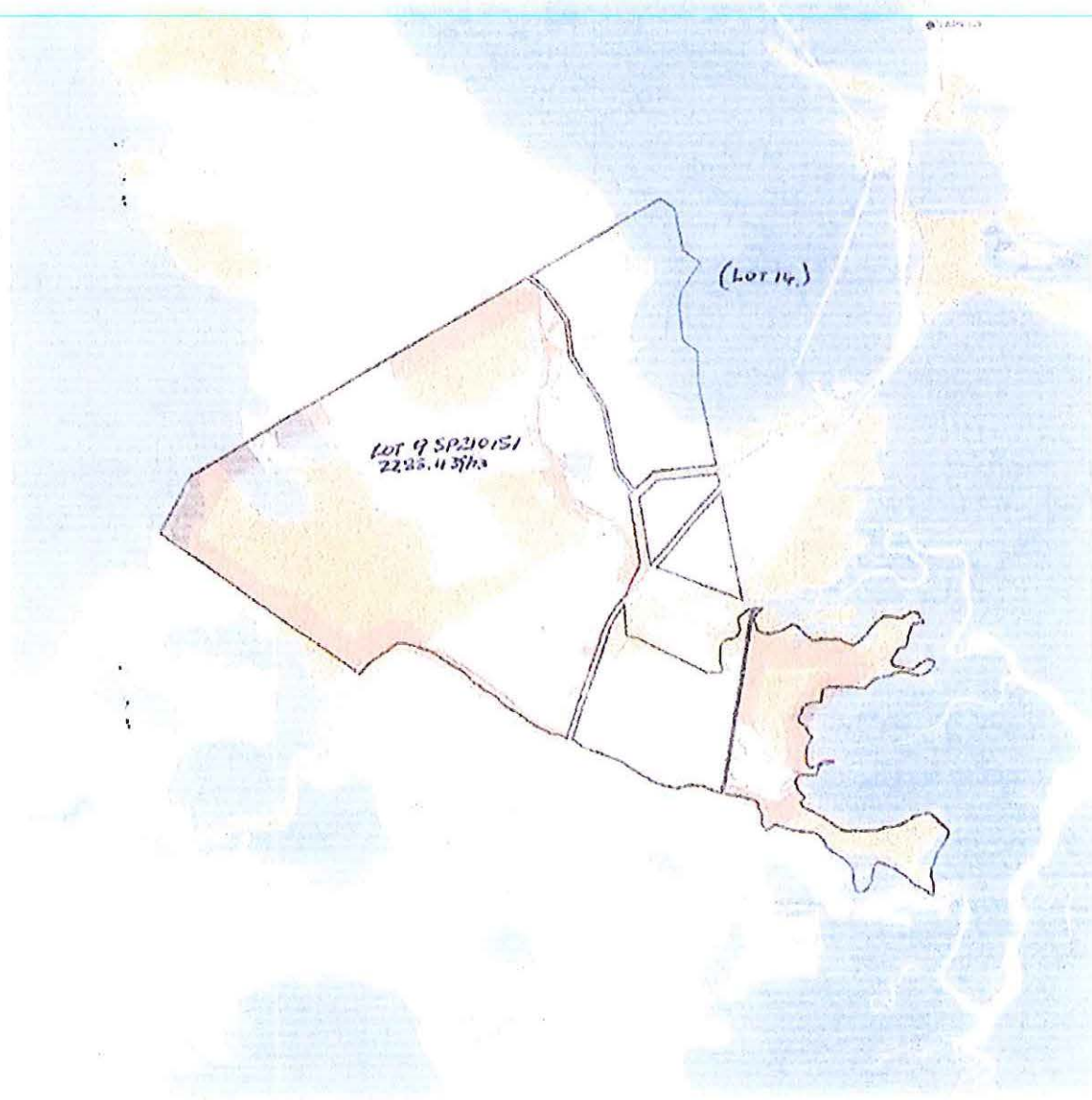
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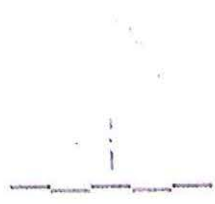
Vegetation Management Act Essential Habitat Map Version 3.1

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 Queensland Government
 Department of Environment and Heritage
 Brisbane, Queensland



LOCALITY DIAGRAM



This map is a representation of the Essential Habitat for the purposes of the Vegetation Management Act 2002. It is not a guarantee of the accuracy of the information shown on this map. The Queensland Government is not responsible for any loss or damage arising from the use of this map.

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**Vegetation management
missions needed**

MISSIONS to the proposed Vegetation Management Framework Amendment Bill 3 close in less than a week. It is vitally important for all AgForce members to make a submission and show their support for the changes. The bill proposes key reforms to the Vegetation Management Act 1999 and the way vegetation is managed in Queensland. It has shown critical recognition of the rural sector's ability to successfully blend environmental outcomes with productivity. In order to ensure the bill has the support it requires to be passed in Parliament and also to ensure debate on the bill is balanced, AgForce has developed a template submission for members to outline their experiences and rationale in explaining why there is a need for change in the vegetation management legislation. A template submission can be found on the vegetation page in the members' only section of the AgForce website. You must login to see the submission link. If you do not know your login details, or are having difficulties logging in, contact the AgForce Brisbane office on (07) 3236 3100. You can also make a submission directly to the State Development, Infrastructure and

Industry Committee by 5pm, April 10, at: State Development, Infrastructure and Industry Committee, Parliament House, Brisbane Queensland 4000, sdiiic@parliament.qld.gov.au

Get down to the farm

If you have friends in Brisbane, spread the word to come down to the Corinda State High School farm for the family fun weekend on May 11-12.

Following on from last year's Inaugural event, Moo Baa Munch looks set to be even bigger and more diverse in the agricultural and rural industries. It will be showcasing this year.

The aims of the event are to:

- Strengthen and rebuild connections between the city and rural Queensland.
 - Promote a positive image of Queensland agriculture to the urban population in relation to our environmental, animal welfare and economic credentials.
 - Promote agriculture as an exciting and rewarding career with multiple pathways.
 - Raise awareness of the origins of food and fibre and the important role farmers play in the lives of each Queensland family.
- Get all the event updates at www.agforce-qld.org.au or www.facebook.com/pages/Moo-Baa-Munch.