

State Development, Infrastructure and Industry Committee
Parliament House
Brisbane Queensland 4000

Submission from Simon and Christine Campbell



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Background

"Norwood" and "Kuringa" have been owned by the Campbell family since 1937. "Glencoe" was purchased in 2009. These properties are owned by Simon and Christine Campbell who operate as Latrobe partnership. These properties are situated near the town of Blackall in central western Queensland.

Production and Environmental Management

We believe that we operate a sustainable and environmentally aware grazing business that encourages biodiversity by:

- Co-operating with government departments in a number of land use research projects;
- Participating in workshops such as EDGE and Grazing Land Management;
- Utilising satellite technology to map and manage feed resources;
- Implementing highly responsive and effective weed management programmes;
- Mapping aboriginal sites and land uses to assist in site preservation;
- Participating in regional panels for vegetation management guidelines;
- Monitoring and recording wildlife; and
- Working with scientists, artists and writers to enlarge and share knowledge of our special and much loved environment.

Property description

The Latrobe properties "Norwood", "Kuringa" and "Glencoe" comprise 25631ha (63308 acres) of freehold land in a rich mix of 51% pasture from gidyea country, 12% Mitchell grasslands, 24% sand ridge, river frontage and herbage country, 8% standing gidyea, and 5% unallocated, roads and other.

In the 1920s ringbarking was used to control encroachment of whipstick gidyea on to the Mitchell grass plains. Since the 1950s mechanical treatments of timber have been used to control gidyea regrowth and to maintain and develop grasslands. We have a good understanding of landscape function and management based on long association with this particular ecosystem.

Under current restrictions imposed by the *Vegetation Management Act 1999* (VMA) we have obtained a "locked in" Property Map of Assessable Vegetation [PMAV] [Cert number 2009/009489] which allows control of regrowth in Category X, which is an area of 14925 ha (36865 acres).

Land use

The properties are used to grow beef and goat meat – sources of protein that the world badly needs. This is a low impact (no cropping, virtually chemical free), renewable (grass) grazing system that has been adapted to the semiarid rangeland since the area was settled by Europeans in the 1860s.

Opening statement

We submit that the proposed changes in the *Vegetation Management Framework Amendment Bill 2013* (the Bill) will address some of the many issues that have arisen out of the implementation of the VMA and subsequent regulations. These issues have introduced constraints to the management of vegetation and other core activities such as weed control which are leading to very poor outcomes for the environmental health of our landscape.

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Above all the proposed changes should restore some dignity to landholders who have been severely marginalised by the excessive punitive and restrictive nature of the VMA and subsequent increasingly restrictive regulations all of which have made landholders appear as pariahs in the wider community.

Context

To its credit the Queensland government has recognised that there is a crisis in landscape management in Queensland and that the crisis is having severe impacts on agricultural businesses. The government is taking positive steps to address the issues. On our properties and more widely in gidyea ecosystems the crisis is particularly exacerbated by an immense number of gidyea seedlings that are invading Mitchell and other grasslands, changing mixed open woodlands into monocultures and choking riparian areas. Ironically some of these invaded riparian areas include those currently declared as 'Wild Rivers' such as the Barcoo River which runs on two sides of our property.

It is important to understand that to treat invasive seedlings and regrowth that there needs to be a particular set of conditions to achieve best outcomes. This might require the seedlings to be of a certain height, the soil moisture to be at a specific level, machinery or other implements required to be available and of course money to pay for the work.

The fourteen years since the introduction of the VMA has proved that the focus on the retention of mature tree in a 'lock in' approach has enabled this explosive seedling growth in ecosystems such as the gidyea ecosystems to be out of control.



Serious gidyea seedling problem Overshot Paddock 'Norwood' October 2012

Specific Comments on Proposed Amendments to the Act

1. Clause 4 Amendment s 3

The addition of an additional purpose that 'allows for sustainable land use' will provide a platform for rebalancing the outcomes of the VMA between purportedly good environmental outcomes and sustainable agricultural production outcomes. The imbalance is demonstrated in the landscape and has been caused by a 'lock in' approach to the landscape through rigid ecosystem classifications and subsequent restrictions on management practices.

It is critical that specific parts of the bill work to achieve this purpose

2. Clause 11 Section 19(O) self-assessable clearing codes for particular purposes

By making provision for self assessable codes (no detail yet but a promise of consultation in Explanatory notes) for routine activities involving vegetation management this allows for the separation of routine activities from genuine development projects. This should allow for practical solutions based on landholder experience to be developed. It is critical that options for clearing are offered so that landscape types are treated suitably.

3. Clause 12- 32 Sections 20A-20AB Vegetation Management Mapping

The proposed regulated vegetation management map which 'locks in' of Category X will take away the ever present threat that regrowth will go through a miracle rebirth and through legislation be given a high value tag or become remnant and therefore untreatable when it is a threat to the health of the environment in itself because of its invasive nature.

Streamlining of the mapping through category clarification is commended.

However there is no proposal to provide a pre-certification review process for landholders, notification of new certified mapping, interactive map amendment or simple no-fee appeal mechanisms. Establishment of this process would enable the trust between landholder and department to be rebuilt as inaccuracies in the mapping, complicated and costly processes to fix the mapping and changes to the mapping without notice have eroded the trust and confidence necessary to best practice landscape management.

4. Clause 38 Sections 20U- Area Management Plans

The ability to develop Area Management Plans (a relatively new process) has been confirmed by their inclusion in this framework bill. Proposed changes extend the use of the plans and offer flexibility through amendment clauses. AMPs offer a ten year time frame and this is some recognition that vegetation management needs longer time frames than five years to produce the

best outcomes. However there is no provision to extend the time frame beyond 10 years and this in itself limits any long term planning.

Our area is covered by a recently approved AMP (Desert Channels AMP Ref 2013/204206) in relation to gidyea thinning and encroachment. In its original form there were very prescribed approaches allowed for the treatment of invasive seedlings. These treatments were confined to a particular mechanical approach for example one machine and a roll bar. If AMPs are to work then other options that have been proven to work at a local level must be allowed as solutions in the AMP for example blade ploughing. Landholders will only choose the best solution for their particular country.

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Of particular concern with this AMP is that it focuses on the retention of mature trees across the landscape. Given the remarkable ability of gidyea to reseed vigorously the AMP is really reinforcing the problem by insistence on the retention of mature trees across the landscape instead of, for example, self sustaining clumps. This focus on mature trees is one of the major issues with the VMA.

5. Clause 46 High value agricultural clearing. Of particular concern is the exclusion of clearing to establish and cultivate native or introduced pastures for the grazing of livestock. This contradicts the new purpose to enable 'sustainable land use'. This relegates demonstrably sustainable grazing systems to a second class tier of agriculture. Including grazing for livestock would allow development applications to proceed in areas classified as least concern.

6. Clause 51 – Penalties

The removal of unfair enforcement and compliance provisions will enable the rebuilding of trust between the landholder and the department which is so necessary to ensure good landscape management outcomes.

Conclusion

The *Vegetation Management Framework Amendment Bill 2013* provides the basis for a reorienting of vegetation management in Queensland in the right direction. It is a good first step to rebuilding trust between landholder and the department and enabling better land management practices to produce healthy landscapes.

Wednesday, 10 April 2013

Christie Campbell

Simon Campbell