SUBMISSION

In providing this submission I refer directly to the key provisions of the legislation which may be amended.

1. Removing High Value Agriculture and Irrigated High Value Agriculture from the Vegetation Management Framework
The removal of High Value Agriculture (HVA) and irrigated HVA (IHVA) would have a detrimental impact on our business by significantly reducing our ability to "drought proof" our property. Each year we plant approximately 5000 acres of forage sorghum as a dietary supplement. With a distinct wet and dry season we need to supply cattle with additional feed during the dry season. Currently, HVA and IHVA permits provide farmers in northern Queensland with the opportunity to grow odder and grain for supplementing in the dry season and finishing off stock for market. If this opportunity was reduced or limited it would ultimately result in an animal welfare issue. Stock losses would increase and viability of enterprises would be jeopardized. The removal of HVA and IHVA is in direct conflict with the Australian Government White Paper on the Development of Northern Australia. A recent example of this was the proposal to spend $220 million being to upgrade roads to communities across Cape York, but Queensland State Government Vegetation Management Framework would prevent indigenous and non-indigenous land holders from developing agriculture projects. Not only is this proposed legislation in conflict with the Government's plan to develop the north, it also conflicts with findings from studies undertaken in the Burdekin Water Catchment. For many years water samples were collected from the natural water courses on our property, Avon Down, 150 km north of Clermont. Despite HVA, studies of water quality in the Burdekin Catchment exhibited low sediment levels. This is because the land being farmed is low, flat terrain and there is nil – minimal run-off and erosion. It is unreasonable for the government to impose a blanket restriction regarding the development of HVA. If such legislation is to be considered it should be on a more specific locality basis. In central and southern Queensland, HVA and IHVA provides opportunity for farmers to drought-proof properties and stabilise production and income over variable climatic and market conditions. Sustainable clearing for relatively small pockets of high value agriculture enable agricultural production to improve continuity of supply to food processors and meet the increasing requirements of international markets and Australia's Free Trade Agreements. The Australian population recently reached 25 million and recent studies predict that by the middle of this century this figure will rise to 40 million. The population is growing at a rate much faster than previously anticipated. Removing HVA agriculture and IHVA from the Vegetation Management Framework will take away the ability of landholders to clear small areas of land to develop farms. Ultimately this will have a detrimental impact on food and fibre production. Land is a limited resource with a limited capacity to produce food. If Australian wants to feed its growing population and remain a viable agricultural nation it is important that further restrictions are not imposed.
2. Retaining Self-Assessable Codes
It is important to retain Self Assessable Codes for Vegetation Management because the existing science-based codes help farmers carry out routine vegetation management practices necessary to sustainably produce food and fibre. The self-assessable codes help farmers ensure trees and grass stay in balance, avoid soil erosion and feed animals in drought.

If the definition of high value regrowth vegetation is aligned with the international definition of High Conservation Value, as proposed by the Amendment Bill, the ability of farmers to produce food would be detrimentally impacted.

Self-Assessable codes have reduced the cost and time taken to make applications for managing vegetation on your property. Living and operating our business in a remote location means that we are a 540km round trip from the nearest government office so being able to use Self assessable codes is an important land management tool. If the Self-assessable codes were taken away and we were required to undertake a development assessment and approval to do the same activity this would limit our ability to effectively manage our property and our business.

Legislators need to understand that farmers work long hours to sustainably manage their land and operate business that are environmentally friendly with humane animal practices. If the government continues to introduce legislation that makes it more difficult to produce food, with increased population growth there will simply not be enough food! We all need to work together for the long term sustainability of our nation which means the correct balance between food production and conservation.

3. Including High Value Regrowth as an additional layer of regulation under the Vegetation Management Framework on leasehold, freehold and indigenous land

. Whereas, the value of High Value Regrowth on our property is difficult to gauge, the costs are undeniably obvious. Having to surrender such areas to the government effects productivity and viability. By decreasing the amount of useable land it makes our business less drought resistant and reduces the overall carrying capacity. The re-inclusion of High Value Regrowth (HVR) as an additional layer of regulation on leasehold, freehold and indigenous land is an overt grab by Queensland Government in search of targets for meeting international treaties such as the Kyoto Protocol. In 2009 when initially introduced, this HVR layer was prepared hastily in a 'desktop' mapping exercise with associated errors including areas of non-native vegetation (such as orchards) and bare earth. In preliminary investigations of several properties it appears that the accuracy of the 2018 HVR remains questionable.
If the free market places a value of $ per tonne on carbon, what is the estimated dollar value of "High Value Regrowth" and where is the Queensland Government's recompense for farmers and indigenous land holders?

4. Increasing Category R regrowth watercourse vegetation to include additional catchments in the Burnett Mary, Eastern Cape York and Fitzroy Great Barrier Reef Catchments.

This increase in Category R provisions is a further restriction on development in Northern Queensland, which is in stark contrast to the development imperatives contained with the White Paper on Developing Northern Australia.

The science is completely unproven on the necessity to include ≥50 metre buffers along streamlines. In fact, a study conducted in Queensland and published in 2016 shows that grass is a far better assimilator for nitrogen to prevent leaching into waterways. The current bleaching of the Great Barrier Reef is not caused by high nutrient runoff from agricultural lands.

Our personal experience highlights that the introduction of this legislation has had a detrimental effect on erosion. By leaving a buffer zone along water courses there was increased shade. Increased shade attracted cattle to the area and this increased the impact of erosion because cattle "camped" under the trees on the banks of the river/creek. Retaining timber in other, less fragile areas of the paddock is more environmentally beneficial than having the high concentration of cattle along the edge of the water courses.

5. That no compensation will be payable to landholders subject to added layers of regulation – high value regrowth, regrowth watercourses and essential habitat during transitional arrangements

. The proposal that compensation will not be available for high value regrowth, regrowth watercourses and essential habitat during the transitional period may be a tactic to prevent panic clearing, but the implications for compensation for vegetation management in the broader sense are quite alarming.

Not only is this in conflict with the Government's proposed attempt to develop the north, it is unethical to restrict landholder earning ability when property has been purchased in good faith with opportunity for agricultural development. Landholders invest significant capital in property development and borrow money on this basis. For this right to be denied is unethical and imposes a negative impact on viability and increased pressure from financial institutions.

With the cessation of broad scale land-clearing, compensation for landholders to offset opportunity cost, lost development potential and decreased property value has been a critical omission from the Vegetation Management Regulatory Framework. The issue of compensation has been debated heavily by federal and state legislators, however a precedent was set by the Beattie Government in 2004 with provision of $150 million over 5 years to offset landholder losses due to the removal of their rights to clear. This however was a copout with the funds
unable to provide effective recompense for opportunity costs incurred, despite prior assessment undertaken for the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry in 2003. In 2004, there was no doubt considerable rejoicing by the Queensland Government who boasted of compensating carbon dioxide abatement for less than $1 a tonne!
In 2018 the transitional arrangement period is quite different to what it was in 2004. The threat to remove HVA, regrowth water courses and essential habitats from farmers' potential to develop property provides considerable grounds for compensation, particularly for those that have structured investments and farm management activities to take advantage of HVA/IHVA in the near future. Also HVA/IHVA has attracted far greater interest in northern Queensland, with large swathes of marginal beef production areas provided the opportunity of growing supplementary feed to overcome the protein drought in the dry season.

The 2003 Commonwealth study mentioned above did not include north or west Queensland Local Government Areas and consequently grossly underestimated the areas to be considered for compensation. Another change since 2004 is the free market recognition of the value of carbon abatement. The Queensland State Government needs to recognise the fact that they are robbing the rights of farmers to develop productive HVA/IHVA land sustainably and that the area for development and value for carbon are much greater than they were in 2004.

6. Increasing compliance measures and penalties under vegetation management laws.

If the proposed legislation is introduced The Bill potentially breaches fundamental legislative principles (FLPs) as outlined in section 4 of the Legislative Standards Act 1992.

Legislation should have sufficient regard to the rights and liberties of individuals and consequently should not adversely affect rights and liberties, or impose obligations, retrospectively.

In addition, penalties have effectively been tripled indicating there is a sense the Government does not think farmers who mistakenly clear vegetation are being penalised enough. The penalities would be harsh compared to penalities for other criminal offences.

It is unreasonable to introduce increased compliance measures and penalties because mapping is often incorrect. A recent example of this occurred when pulling was being done on our property. An area of virgin scrub country was encountered and according to the existing vegetation maps we were

legally able to pull this particular section. As conservations, we used our discretion and left the area untouched. This not only exemplifies that mapping errors do occur, it also proves that landholders are not the criminals/environmental vandals we are too often perceived to be. This proposed legislation highlights the fact that legislators do not understand that landholders are aware of the need for conservation to achieve long term agricultural sustainability.

7. Other matters relevant to the Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018 that the review committee should consider appropriate and worth some consideration

Farmers are subject to continuous uncertainties of climate and markets. There are limited factors that can be controlled so the increased uncertainty associated with changes to vegetation management legislation would add increased pressure to our present challenging and difficult existence. Proposed legislative changes would ultimately decrease the value of our land because potential for development would be restricted.

The uncertainty of continual legislative change means that producers are unable to make long term management decisions for sustainable environmental and agricultural production outcomes. The right balance between these two factors is vital for long term viability. Producers are aware of the importance of conservation and the long term future of our families depends on the correct balance being achieved between conservation and development.

As custodians of our land, we view our relationship with our properties as a perpetual association. The high cost of land has meant that individuals are rarely capable of purchasing a viable living area in one generation. Land ownership passes from one generation to the next. Whilst politicians come and go from power, our association with the land continues for many generations. For this reason landholders are very aware of the need to have the correct balance between conservation and agricultural development. This fact is continuously overlooked by legislators who fail to understand that Australian farmers are conservationists, not the environmental vandals we are so often falsely accused of being.

If legislation such as the proposed changes to the current Vegetation Management Act 1999, Planning Act 2016, Planning Regulation 2017 and Water Act 2000 are introduced the rights of landholders to achieve long term agricultural sustainability will be eroded. For Australia to successfully contribute to the increased global demand for food, there needs to be less focus on short term political agendas and more awareness of the long term viability of our nation.

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