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Mulga grows in Outback Australia. It is a species of the native acacia tree. It is a greedy tree that retains water at its base. Rain water runs down the leaves, through the tree and forms a foamy pool at its base.

"Pushing of mulga" is the process of bringing the leaves down to a height where stock can reach. The resulting bending or breaking of mulga trunks does not mortally wound the tree. On the contrary, it stimulates new growth along broken trunks and branches which occurs within a few days. If left to itself mulga grows in thick tall clumps. It is difficult for stock to move through and discourages grass or groundcover.

There was a ruling in 2015 that stopped "stick-raking" which is clearing the ground around mulga of broken branches after pushing. Experienced graziers leave such material on the ground where it has fallen in order to limit wind and water erosion and to protect the fallen seeds of the tree. This is part of their fodder management.

Paddocks with mulga as well as pasture are considered desirable because when pasture is gone the mulga remains and when managed mulga regenerates and thrives on just a limited amount of moisture. As such mulga is a renewable resource. It remains a renewable resource only while it is managed and not left to grow unrestrained reducing pasture and accessible fodder and in turn the productivity of the land.

I am writing on behalf of graziers in Charleville. Here are properties with fourth generation graziers. Their intention is to look after their land and keep it productive. The intention is also to keep stock bloodlines going and resist the alternative of de-stocking and starting afresh with years of delay in production.

This area is experiencing a 6-year drought. Winter rain arrived in 2016 with no follow-up rain to date. For those holdings that are struggling to maintain stock mulga is the only feed surviving. Mulga is keeping these animals alive.

Should this supply of food not be available to be used de-stocking either by sale or destruction of beasts would result in a future limited production of Australian-supplied meat. Australians would then be at the mercy of foreign supplied meat – both in quality and price. There is a need to maintain some stock in order to fill the anticipated loss of supply by the Australian market.

As in 2015 the vegetation clearance ruling accepted the pushing of mulga if no stick-raking followed this. If a "pushing" licence with its protracted administration delays were re-introduced mulga could no longer be pushed when desperately required resulting in:

- 1) a rush on the sale yards for beasts in acceptable condition to be transported, sending prices through the floor, or
- 2) destruction of beasts where funds do not allow, the price of transport exceeds the price of the animals at sale, or where beast condition is too poor for transport
- 3) the removal of this year's weaners leaving a shortfall in mature beast for slaughter in years to follow

Hand feeding is not a possibility funds-wise after 6 years of drought and where there might be the possibility of agistment the cost of \$1 per beast per day, amounts to thousands per week. There is no such agistment of feed along stock routes in the Murweh Shire. Donated hay is not a substitute for managed fodder as it has little sustenance.

While city-based Australians may be familiar with the word "Mulga", few have an appreciation of its place in native bushland or its role as an accompaniment to natural or sown pasture.

Mulga is a valuable tool in the mix for maintaining holdings that have been worked through floods and droughts by generations who accumulate and pass on knowledge and skills through a lifetime of working these properties. While mulga continues to be "worked" it provides a renewable source of feed to cattle and sheep.

Therefore mulga-pushing should be excluded from the ban on private land clearance as it is providing a renewable resource. This resource of managed mulga is a major backstop for graziers wishing to maintain their long-developed stocklines and their family businesses - Australian owned and operated businesses providing constancy of supply of Australian product.

Made. Anne Miller.

NEWS



Rural

Mulga country graziers struggle to understand new land clearing laws

ABC Western Qld By Nicole Bond, Aneeta Bhole

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Graziers like Scott Sargood are concerned the proposed changes to the legislation will destroy their livelihood. (ABC News: Nicole Bond)

Graziers in south-west Queensland are scrambling to understand changes to tree and land clearing laws before they are passed through Parliament.

The vegetation management bill, which set out how trees were cleared or protected, was introduced into Queensland Parliament last weekend and is open for consultation.

The Labor government made strengthening the laws a platform leading up the last election.

Charleville grazier Scott Sargood was so concerned about the bill he has run a petition against the laws,

attracting almost 6,000 signatures.

"It's very, very difficult in the mulga country to be restricted anymore, to comply and be viable," he said.

In the south-west corner of the state, graziers used the leaves from mulga trees to feed their stock in times of drought.

Under previous and current laws, graziers were able to obtain a fodder harvesting permit to bulldoze trees so cattle could reach the leaves.

According to rural lobby group Agforce, under the new fodder harvesting code graziers could clear 50 metre strips and were required to leave 75 metres of trees standing.

The code said graziers could now only fodder harvest in 500 hectare parcels and must provide evidence to the department they were sticking to the code.

Mr Sargood said when he bought his 34 thousand hectare property for \$2.25m in 2014, it was predominantly open country with box trees.

"Eventually the mulga has crept through it which is an advantage if you are allowed to keep it under control, but if you aren't it becomes unproductive," he said.

The property had been drought stricken for about five years and the Sargoods used a combination of fodder harvesting and thinning permit to feed their cattle.

What is the land clearing picture in Queensland?

SLATS reports are produced by the Queensland Government and released each year. Here's a breakdown of annual land clearance rates between 2012-16:

- 2012-13: 261,000 hectares
- 2013-14: 295,000 hectares
- 2014-15: 298,000 hectares
- 2015-16: 395,000 hectares
- Total: 1.2 million hectares

Source: Is Queensland clearing land as fast as Brazil?



Graziers in south west Queensland call mulga 'living hay' because of its ability to feed livestock through drought. (Supplied: Kevin Bredhauer)

But now he will have to submit a development application to thin the mulga.

Mr Sargood is worried that will be expensive, require specialist help and take too long.

"The development application is more than \$3,000 but we've been asking around and consultants who help with the paperwork are quoting around \$10,000," he said.

Mr Sargood calculated that without a thinning permit, he would have just an 18 month supply of food for his cattle.

"And then under the new laws I can't touch that land for 10 years," he said.

Fears for drought affected towns

Further south, Paroo Shire Council Mayor Lindsay Godfrey said the new laws had been met with a lot of "hostility" by drought affected towns in south west Queensland.

"Everyone is doing their bit to protest this law ... we already have a workable plan in place," he said.



Graziers push mulga to feed livestock during drought conditions. (ABC News: Aneta Bhole)

"People are in a drought, most people are struggling, people don't have time to go and start reading up on these laws and making submissions."

Cr Godfrey said mulga was known as "living hay" in the south west and without the current practices, people would not be able to remain in their communities.

"Mulga is one of the reliable tools that we have for a lot of the area to get us through droughts, the more you push it down the more it grows."

With the drought rolling into its fifth year in the region, Cr Godfrey said communities had been deserted and the new laws were going to destroy what was left.

"We're trying to grow our communities and we're already losing people," he said.

According to Cr Godfrey, research going back almost three decades was being ignored in the process of implementing the land clearing legislation.

Managing the mulga

South West NRM is a natural resources management company based in Charleville, it receives state and federal funding to implement and oversee environmental projects in the area.

Project officer Craig Alison said mulga was a unique tree.

"There is no other sort of vegetation in Queensland which is utilised as a fodder resource in drought conditions," he said.

But that was not the only reason it stood out.

Mr Alison said mulga was a woody weed that had been managed by man since before colonisation.



Project officer Craig Alison says left unchecked, mulga will damage the ecosystem. (ABC News: Nicole Bond)

"Traditional owners would have practiced mosaic burning which would have produced a patch work of young juvenile and adult trees," he said.

"Then after colonisation, graziers used sheep and goats now they are using modern techniques."

Mr Alison said if mulga was allowed to grow unchecked a tree desert would form.

"A mono culture grows, there's no sunlight getting into the ground, there's no perennial pasture composition, there is a high erosion potential and the trees eventually choke themselves," he said.

Under the microscope for four years

The Natural Resources Minister Dr Anthony Lynham said an independent review had been conducted by infrastructure and environmental services company Cardno, which included both the fodder and thinning codes.

"They took extensive review of how the self-assessable codes were progressing and people like Agforce and Queensland farmers all contributed to that review," Dr Lynham said.

"It was Cardno's recent review that we had to do something to tighten up the fodder codes just a little bit."

Dr Lynham said he understood why fodder was so important for people in western Queensland.

"We understand that in times of drought, fodder is essential — that's why there still is a fodder harvesting code in there but it has been modified based on that review," he said.

Dr Lynham said Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk had every intention to have a full consultation process and was organising public hearings.

"The Premier is keen that this bill has a full consultation process through the parliamentary committee," he said.



Queensland premier Anastacia Palaszczuk's new tree clearing legislation has been met with concern from graziers and agricultural bodies in Queensland. (ABC Western Queensland: Aneta Bhole)

"The parliamentary committee will report back to us and if the legislation has to be adjusted, we adjust legislation."

Graziers have said two weeks was not enough time for consultation, but Dr Lynham disagreed.

"This has been going on for four years — it's a long, long time and I've been talking at length with people out west about these laws," he said.

"I fully understand. I have a lot of sympathy. I respect people in the bush because most farmers are doing the right thing.

Public hearings will take place in Brisbane next week with regional public hearings to be announced.

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Fact check: Does Australia have one of the 'highest loss of species anywhere in the world'?



Greens Leader Senator Richard Di Natale says Australia has one of the "highest loss of species anywhere in the world"