

RE Submission to Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018.

The opportunity to provide comment and feedback via a submission process is appreciated, however unfortunately we do not have much faith in anything being actioned or seriously taken into consideration, however we do hope to be proven wrong.

The accessibility to find the correct pages and information to provide a submission in itself is a barrier for many to be able to have their say and provide food for thought to the legislators who cannot fully comprehend the impacts and repercussions of legislation out on ground.

Our comments and submission are being made from south western Queensland and from the heart of the Mulga lands so our perspective and comments all relate directly to the effects on this region and the Mulga vegetation communities.

We have seen the gradual erosion of rights of landholders to manage their land over the years and have seen first-hand the effects of this and many other recent changes and additions to legislation which has impacted individual properties, small rural communities and now is flowing on and impacting rural towns.

The pressures that are continually being placed on the bush and on the production of food and fibre are just growing in number and complexity. Whether they be financial, logistical, environmental, physical or legislative. It is becoming a prerequisite for a farmer to have a legal background to be able to read and comprehend the impacts and repercussions of these numerous and continued changes to relevant legislation be it Biosecurity, Water, Vegetation, Chemical use and so on and so forth.

By putting the onus to understand and fully comprehend all the relevant legislation back on to the landholder is massively increasing the pressures on their limited resources and time. The reliance on these self-assessable codes within Acts is also placing more pressure on landholders with the outcomes most likely being non-compliance due to confusion and lack of understanding. In addition, the days of the small family farm seem to be numbered due to the consistent and constant changes in all sorts of legislation that only the larger companies and corporations can seem to keep abreast of.

The timing of this legislation is especially difficult for people to deal with after 6 years and currently ongoing drought conditions. There has been a reliance on mulga as a valuable and renewable stock fodder for many properties to retain their core breeding herds and flocks and the introduction of this Bill and the consequences are the last straw for many people. When people are already at a lowest point and struggling to retain valuable core breeding genetics to enable them to come out the other end of this drought these further restrictions and controls will force people "over the edge" and leave them with no future enterprise.

The issue of dealing with "one size fits all" raises its head with this tree clearing legislation. When consistent documentation and information being produced by the government ties tree clearing and protection of the Great Barrier Reef into one and the same it only illustrates to those of us who do know QLD and its geography that the legislators do not understand the geography of this state. There appears to be no rationale as to why different areas / regions are not dealt with as a separate subsection and criteria at the very least.

Mulga Lands **Do Not** have any direct correlation or connection into the water quality and issues directly related to the Reef; the watersheds and catchments are very clearly separated. The issues of concern that apply to the Mulga lands are very, very different to the issues on the eastern sea board and associated vegetation communities and therefore need to be separated out and different measure's applied.

The large scale development based clearing around major urban centres for housing development does not seem to be targeted in the same way as the harvesting of Mulga is. This is where the habitat loss and real risk of sedimentation and run off is occurring however it appears from the bush's perspective that different rules apply depending on the "catchment of votes" not the reality of land management practices. The majority of "clearing" in the Mulga lands is the ongoing management of thickening vegetation and management of regrowth in areas that have previously been cleared sustainable land management practices NOT clearing of old growth or undisturbed ecosystems.

Just these two issues alone; being the clear separation of watersheds and catchments of the Mulga Lands and that Mulga being an Acacia or commonly known as a wattle and having the ability to proliferate and regenerate makes it blatantly incomparable to other vegetation communities in QLD.

Increases in Carbon farming has created social and economic issues and pressures on western QLD particularly SW QLD and continued legislative pressures around Vegetation Laws will have the potential impact of leaving this as the only land use left open to many properties. As a result, Mulga lands will be sold off as carbon credits to international and interstate firms and investors resulting in increasingly massive areas of effectively unmanaged and unoccupied tracts of land creating a monoculture of mulga to the detriment of the ecosystem reducing the overall biodiversity of plants and wildlife.

We speak from first-hand experience here. At present our property already has two sides on which carbon farming is occurring and over the last 5 years that these have been operating as Carbon enterprises, there has been NO support for ongoing maintenance, upgrading and or replacement of fencing. In fact there has **never** even been a single vehicle or bike track along these boundary fences by these Carbon "farmers" during their ownership to indicate someone has been there. There has been no coordinated feral and weed control and in the case of the one overseas investment company there has been no contact or ability to contact them from the local manger (who is supposed to look after 3 properties) thru to Operation Manager or company representative. All of our communication to them by phone, letters or emails has never replied to.

The ongoing and directly related impacts are resulting in massive areas of particularly the Mulga lands being either managed by Absentee farmers or under Carbon farming investments. As a result no one is living on the property and at best these properties receive a visit once a month or even less frequently. Phone, power and mail services are suspended and cut off, infrastructure such as buildings and sheds are deteriorating rapidly whilst land management problems such as erosion, weed and feral pest are increasing exponentially. No expenditure occurs within local rural communities and towns resulting in decreasing support and services within these areas.

The lack of pest and weed programs further erodes the livestock management for others and it falls to those left living in the region to do all the normal land management roles which once were shared but now sadly because of the lack of people living on the farms there is an ever increasing burden on the few who remain.

In addition to the issues of fencing, weed and feral control, fire management will become a massive issue and has the capacity to decimate much of the vegetation types and land forms supposedly being protected under legislation.

As no one lives on properties and the properties infrastructure has been downscaled with resources, plant, equipment and labour being removed, there is no means to fight fires. Power and phone is turned off and there is no one home to notice a fire start so it will be considerable time before anyone is able to raise the alarm, deal and respond to any incident.

Those left occupying properties out here will not be leaving home to tackle fires on other unoccupied properties - they will stay home and back burn to protect their own areas and assets. The impacts of fires once the current drought conditions break could result in huge and intensively hot fires resulting in massive vegetation losses in turn leading to major issues with sedimentation and erosion into creeks and rivers. The economic costs in addition to the environmental losses and impacts have the potential to be catastrophic.

There has been no thought to the ongoing consequences of impacts of Carbon farming after the 25 year + contracts are up. These properties will be seriously downgraded and degraded as to their infrastructure and assets and from build-up of weeds and feral pest and there will be no "value" from the trees after this point. Given restrictions on vegetation management there will be no avenue to clear and re-establish viable pasture for stock, so these properties will become degraded and useless, unwanted tracts of land. Between the economic costs to re-invest into fencing and infrastructure and the legislative restrictions on ability to manage land these properties will become a very sad legacy of current poor governmental decisions.

PMAV information is not based on ground truthed mapping but estimations of what is thought to be present. In many cases this is incorrect and or is an under or over estimate of the growth capacity of that particular vegetation type. So far in our experience to get this considered or even acknowledged is almost impossible and then when you do get a response from the Department it is along the lines of that is not our responsibility or charter but needs to be looked at by the QLD Herbarium.

So in an attempt to get accurate mapping and classification of vegetation types to improve the accuracy and quality of information these decisions are based on, Landholders are being yet again blocked and fobbed off with no avenue of recourse or guidelines to be able to make positive progress towards clarification and solutions.

There needs to be greater accountability and transparency of the information these decisions are being based on and where Land Holders are already providing extensive information to the Department re discrepancies these need to be **actioned** and **on site on ground field assessments** need to be able to take place, feeding back into the Department data and into other agencies such as the QLD Herbarium who set the broad classification types these codes are based on.

All of this impacts on the ability to be able to produce food and fibre to support our lifestyle and economy. So not providing a follow through mechanism to update and truth information is unfairly and unduly impacting on people's viability.

Being legislated out of a sustainable and productive farming is difficult to understand. Is it the intention of the government to remove farming from these areas?

If it is, fairly buy out the properties and instigate government run management programs across these regions!

This I am sure is not the intention of government, as it is all too clear that government owed and run land is not successfully managed particularly in relation to pest and weed control or fire management as it is. But please note that this may well be the ultimate outcome if continuing along with these restrictions and limitations that are not based on sustainable land management practices and principles.

To conclude we feel that there needs to be significant time and discussion given to several aspects effected by this Legislation.

- Separation and clear delineation between land types and catchments being dealt with under the legislation ie Mulga lands being dealt with under separate and specific sustainable management rules.
- Consequences and effects of imposing unworkable legislation resulting in increasing tracts of unoccupied properties and the flow on effects that will ultimately impact on many mainstream Australians given increased food prices increased imports etc needs to be clearly undertaken.
- No one is looking at legislation or enforcement of current legislation to ensure that requirements or programs such as weed and feral control take place and are carried out across the landscapes, deal with current legislation and outcomes before imposing new unworkable legislation that will compound issues.

Again - Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment via a submission to your process and we do hope that due consideration is given to all submissions and that action is taken to fairly and sustainably develop appropriate legislation to assist land owners to manage their land in appropriate and sustainably productive ways.

We will wait and watch with interest as to how this all develops and unfolds from here.

Regards

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