

SUBMISSION

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

1. Retaining Self-Assessable Codes is essential to the viability of our cattle business

Our cattle business would not have survived the last 6 years without the self-assessable codes. Retaining these codes are essential to the future of our business.

In 2012, we purchased "Rylstone" a 32 000 acre Mulga block west of Charleville as a start-up block. Fortunately, we came with the credentials to manage such a block as Cameron was an Earthmoving contractor with 14 years experience managing vegetation and Jacqui was a Veterinarian with 7 years experience in rural mixed practice. We had also both grown up in rural areas of Queensland breeding cattle. Unbeknown to us we were about to enter 6 years of relentless drought.

Fortunately, the self assessable thinning codes were introduced which has allowed us to sustainably manage our 500 head breeder herd. We have set up a drought management plan by utilising the self-assessable thinning codes which entails selectively thinning fodder areas on the property. We currently harvest about 80% of the Mulga trees leaving between 30 and 200 trees per ha depending on the code. This is a 10 year cycle of fodder management where we can harvest an area of mulga knowing that we will not need to harvest this area for another 10 years. Within the 10 year cycle we have areas of mulga regenerating and other areas we are currently harvesting. The regenerating areas will actually be more productive in the future as for every mulga tree that is felled, 3 -10 mulga trees regenerate as a result. This will provide us with a continuous supply of mulga regrowth. Strip harvesting on our property however will not be a viable option for fodder management as a lot of the areas of Mulga we have to fodder harvest are not 500m wide strips. Removing the self-assessable codes puts our whole business in jeopardy. After reviewing the State Code 16, we have identified 2 serious concerns that will make thinning in the Mulga country unfeasible.

1) That no mature trees can be harvested.

This would make It absolutely impossible to mechanically clear the immature trees between the mature trees.

2) We will only be allowed to harvest 10%of the Mulga in Category B areas when we have planned to harvest 80% of the Mulga in these regions.

We will not have enough Mulga to feed our cattle under the new legislation.

We regard mulga as a valuable feed source on our property and we know that despite the 5 inch rainfall total of 2017, we can continue to feed our cows by thinning the Mulga under the self-assessable codes. The regeneration of the Mulga is the most important part of our business. We regard the regional ecosystem as a number one priority as it is vital to the sustainability of our enterprise. If however we are not able to manage the Mulga effectively then it will take over and grow into unmanageable regions (tall thick tree clumps). In areas of unmanaged mulga

we already see more erosion due the reduction in grasses and ground cover. These areas also become uninhabitable to native wildlife.

If the self-assessable thinning codes are removed, this will markedly reduce the profitability of our cattle business. We will be forced to sell a large number of our breeder herd as we will have insufficient fodder to harvest under the proposed legislation. We are having serious doubts about encouraging our children to enter the rural industry due to the constant attacks on farmers rights. Farmers are unable to plan for the future when there is so much uncertainty about changes in legislation that seriously affect our profitability and sustainability. Farmers must commit to a large debt and long term loans in order to acquire their properties. Farmers have a plan for the future well before ruthless legislation is handed down. This government is crippling our industry and the future for our farmers is bleak just when over-population and a reliable world food source is imperative.

In summary, we have not just survived but we have maintained production despite 6 years of relentless drought. We have done this by utilising the self-assessable codes and by implementing water infrastructure assisted by the Emergency water infrastructure rebate (EWIR). Through the stroke of a pen of an ill-informed government you will destroy any chance we have of running a viable business. We will be forced to sell our core breeder herd and yet another cattle grazier bites the dust as a result of inappropriate government legislation.

2. Retaining Self-assessable codes is vital to our Earthmoving business

Not only do we sustainably manage a 500 head breeder herd, we also have an Earthmoving business that operates within Queensland, mostly in the local Charleville/Augathella region. As a contractor we manage the vegetation and feed cattle on other graziers' properties. This type of work includes thinning Mulga which graziers see as the most effective way to feed cattle with the least disruption to the ecosystem. Graziers see the advantage in causing minimal disruption to the Mulga ecosystem as they are well aware that they will need to utilise more of the Mulga in subsequent years. Graziers are usually unable to utilise strip pulling with a contractor as the dozers are only needed to pull a strip of Mulga once every 3 days. The contracting dozers would then sit idle in the meantime which is not viable in our Earthmoving business. As a result, graziers would then be forced to purchase their own dozers and a scrub pulling chain all to the value of approximately \$200 000 - \$300 000. They would also be burdened with dozer maintenance and repair which is not cheap. The proposed legislation is crippling graziers.

We employ 8 staff in the form of dozer operators, mechanics and welders. With the introduction of the new legislation our Earthmoving business will suffer as a result of removing the self-assessable codes. Already we are considering having to terminate 4 employees due to the inability to perform the thinning that had been requested by graziers. Cameron's brother, in the Morven district, mirrors our Earthmoving business with 8 staff and he too is looking to terminate employees as a result of the downturn in work with the introduction of the new legislation. This legislation is causing people to lose their jobs, with no compensation. The flow on effects of this are endless. More people unemployed, less money in the towns, closures of

small businesses and people moving to the cities. Small towns become ghost towns.

The reduction in work as a result of this proposed legislation is likely to cost our Earthmoving business approximately \$650 000 each year. Where is the compensation? As a small business are we supposed to absorb these costs? Well, in a small business, costs cannot just be 'absorbed', every cent counts as we are on a strict budget to stay afloat.

3. Legislative changes without prior warning.

Management changes on a cattle property take months to years to implement. Farmers manage what resources they have in order to feed and water their stock. Legislative changes that expect farmers to change their management plan overnight will be the cause for a class-action into animal welfare. Through our drought management plan, we had ensured that we had enough Mulga to continually feed our herd. Now with the proposed changes we will be forced to sell drought affected animals for half their value, if somebody will buy them. This will likely cause us to lose about \$800 per head for 500 cows = \$ 400 000. This is a huge loss that could cause us to become insolvent.

Feeding cattle is an expensive task, we have already spent approximately \$350 000 buying the dozers and scrub pulling chains. We supplement the cattle with cotton seed and trace mineral lick blocks and now you are reducing the roughage in their diet by limiting the amount of Mulga fodder we can harvest. Cattle require 5% of their bodyweight in roughage every single day. For a 400kg cow, that is 20kg of roughage every single day. We currently provide about 3kg of cottonseed for each cow each day at a cost of \$1.50 per head per day (that's \$2100 per week for the 200 cows we are feeding at the moment). So they still need another 17kg of roughage. The only roughage they are eating comes from our most valuable Mulga trees. We must be allowed to harvest the Mulga trees under the self-assessable codes to feed our cows. The mulga will grow back and it will be thicker than before. With the combination of adequate roughage, cottonseed and trace minerals, cows can lactate and support their calf. Take away the access to plentiful roughage and the cow will not survive, neither will the calf.

As a veterinarian, I see overnight legislation that threatens to remove access to fodder as a serious concern for the welfare of our animals.

4. Removing High Value Agriculture and Irrigated High Value Agriculture from the Vegetation Management Framework

High value agriculture (HVA) and irrigated HVA (IHVA) is just that. These are areas of high value to the agricultural industry. These are areas that can be developed to improve production and welfare of cattle during the dry seasons. Farmers must be able to provide nutrition to their stock and at the same time be a viable business.

Personally, we do not have any areas of HVA or IHVA on our property but I fully understand the concern by farmers who are affected by removing the right to apply for a development application for HVA or IHVA. Properties have been purchased in the last 12 months with a view to develop unproductive land into farming areas. A change which positively contributes to Queensland's food and fibre production. These people who are innovative and resourceful and spend significant amounts of money to improve the country are being demonised by the government. The properties they have purchased for development are now worthless due to the removal of HVA and IHVA from the vegetation management framework.

Once again, overnight legislation is a serious concern for the rural people of Queensland and makes us question as to whether farmers have any rights.

5. That no compensation will be payable to landholders

Compensation will be sought by farmers when access to their most valuable resource, Mulga, is once again restricted. Farmers will also seek compensation for increased regulation of high value regrowth, high value agriculture and irrigated high value agriculture.

In our situation, as mentioned above, we are looking at a loss of \$400 000 in reduced cattle sales due to the need to sell drought affected animals. In our Earthmoving business we estimate a \$650 000 loss due to the downturn in work. Is the government going to compensate us for this loss? What about the people who never get paid when we become insolvent? The government must take responsibility for their actions. Compensation must be given to farmers to allow them to continue on.

We will also have to terminate at least 4 employees who also should be compensated as they will be losing their jobs as a direct result of the implementation of this legislation.

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

Farmers must have rights.

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.

Farmers feel threatened by this government's clear lack of respect for the rural sector and the affect that this legislation will have on our sustainability. Farmers should not be forced to sell drought stricken cattle as a result of this legislation. Farmers should not be forced to become insolvent as a result for this legislation.

In addition, the Government has effectively tripled penalties for incorrect management of vegetation indicating there is a sense the Government does not think farmers who mistakenly clear vegetation are being penalised enough. Farmers have lost confidence in the mapping of vegetation as there are often areas mapped incorrectly. It is a time-consuming process to get maps changed and the farmer is always considered incorrect until they can provide extensive evidence to their case.

As a contractor, mapping errors are a regular occurrence. In some cases, a mulga regional ecosystem (RE) can be mapped as a brigalow RE. A similar scenario would be mapping the rain forest as a desert. This is why self-assessable codes as so important. No one knows the vegetation as well as the landholder.

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

Measuring regrowth:

Has the government actually been measuring the regrowth of vegetation over the last 20 years? We are constantly hearing about the vegetation that is being cleared but what about the regrowth. Despite operating our Earthmoving business for the last 22 years, we still have a very small client base (about 20 clients). The dozers are driven every day that weather permits. The reason why we don't have many clients is because we have to constantly return to the same properties to deal with the regrowth. The regrowth does not come back in nice sparse arrangements, it comes back thick and prolific and needs to be managed. From ground level, we can honestly say that the vegetation is regrowing at a much faster rate than we can keep it down. Stop misleading the public to think that vegetation is being cleared faster than it is regrowing.

COST-NEUTRAL?

We do not see the implementation of this legislation as being cost-neutral as implied by the Hon. A Lynam in his introductory speech to this Bill. The implementation of this legislation has a huge affect on current farmers' budgets and profitability as well as a long lasting effect on the future productivity of the rural sector. Where are the projected figures on what this legislation is actually going to cost Queensland's productivity? Have these figures been entered into the national budget or do ministers think this will not affect Queensland's future productivity? We are a food and fibre producing state. We must be able to utilise the resources we have available to continually increase production in line with a growing world population.

In the Public Briefing on Monday 19 March 2018, Brent Mickelberg MP asked the question as to whether the Department (DNRME) has undertaken any modelling in relation to the effects the proposed legislation will have on agricultural production across the state in the future.

The answer given by the DNRME was a flat out "No"!

When Mr Mickelberg asked if the government intended to do any modelling in relation to the matter, he once again received a flat out "No"!

How can this legislation be introduced when the government cannot project the figures as to what this legislation will cost Queensland. As landholders, business owners and members of the general public, we are appalled by this lack of regard for the financial viability of the State of Queensland.

Summary

In summary, I seriously oppose the Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018. Farmers are being demonised and their rights and liberties destroyed when they are honest, hard-working Australians who make a huge commitment to their industry and at the same time take on a large debt. Farmers must be able to utilise their resources (Mulga, HVA, IHVA, regrowth) that they have planned to use in order to repay their debts. Farmers plan for the future but it has become increasingly difficult to do so with the constant changing of vegetation management laws. I would like the committee to take the time to consider the immediate and long term effects that this legislation will have on farmers, the rural sector, Queensland's food and fibre production and the world's food supply.

Signed:	<i>Conkell</i>
Address:	
Date:	<i>20/3/18</i>