

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 prohibition of clearing for High Value Agriculture and Irrigated High Value Agriculture is an attempt to live in the past. It makes no concession to world population growth, agricultural industry growth, employment opportunities, northern development or growth of the national economy. The reduction in productivity from the Murray Darling Plan will need to be replaced by higher production from other areas. This policy will prevent such development.

Due to the low rainfall, our grazing enterprise is unlikely to be able to undertake HVA but if at some future time irrigation water became available then I-HVA may allow further development and productivity with consequent increase in employment opportunities.

The immediate effect however is a loss of closer supplies of drought fodder and marketing of livestock to businesses that have the ability to add value over a range of seasonal conditions. It is conceivable that we could breed cattle to supply feedlots and processors to our near north for Asian markets. This opportunity will be lost if this Policy is pursued.-

2. Retaining Self-Assessable Codes

The SAC's have been one of the success stories of Vegetation Management. Prior to their introduction a long and detailed and expensive application process had to be undertaken to allow simple and necessary clearing tasks to be undertaken. The process bogged down the Department's staff to such an extent that even basic applications took months to process. The cost to landholders was significant and the cost to the Department must have been horrific.

The SAC's ensured that responsibility was borne by the landholder to get it right and reduced the Departmental workload to an oversight role.

By using the SACs we have been able to economically undertake clearing for infrastructure and we note that this SAC remains unchanged at present.

The revised SAC for thinning is a concern. The main culprit on our property is gidgee which usually starts from a number of scattered mature trees. Seedlings from these trees can rapidly fill in the spaces between the mature trees particularly following an above average wet season. This forms a thicket that is often dense enough to make walking through it difficult. Under the revised SAC thinning is not permitted in thickets. These thickets then become the source of encroachment, loss of grassland and therefore biodiversity and end up as a monoculture of gidgee. The thickening and subsequent encroachment of gidgee is a prime cause of loss of productive grazing land and consequent economic losses.



Gidgee thickening – Almost impenetrable – note spacing of mature trees.

The ability to limit the thickening and spread of gidgee is essential and the current SAC processes will result in further ongoing loss of grassland, albeit at a slower rate than without the ability to thin, but a loss all the same.

The SACs need to be retained for all clearing activities to reduce the time and expense of having to do a development assessment for basic land maintenance. They should aim to restore the land to as close as possible to pre white settlement and the introduction of grazing livestock. They should not be constructed in a way that results in a gradually increasing amount of tree cover over what was grass land.

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

We have no High Value Regrowth on our property but in principle we oppose any restrictions on managing regrowth. Once an area has been legally cleared it should automatically become Category X. The decision has been made – stick to it! The shortening of the time limit for reversion from Regrowth to High Value Regrowth from almost 30 years to 15 is an example of taking away an on going productive asset without compensation. Sometimes economic and seasonal limitations prevent expensive activities like clearing at the desired time intervals. A shorter time for reversion to High Value Regrowth would expose people to either expenditure at an inappropriate time or loss of a productive asset.

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

We have no land on these catchment so can offer no first hand response.

<p>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</p>
<p>Compensation should be payable if the laws take away the productive potential of the land regardless of the type of tenure. In addition freehold title holders are losing the ownership of the trees on their land and should be compensated. Eg When leasehold land is freehold the Government values the commercial timber and requires the landholder to pay for them. These laws effectively put purchased assets out of reach of the owner.</p>
<p>6. Increasing compliance measures and penalties under vegetation management laws.</p>
<p>he level of penalties that have been reported to have been applied to farmers for breaches of the Act are already excessive. For many farmers who are already in precarious financial positions following the current drought such penalties would mean selling of their properties/homes/businesses. The cases where prosecution has taken place over owners as result of Departmental mapping errors are scandalous. The possibility of being forced to pay a significant fine because of a lack of the funds necessary to contest a case is very real. Historically all evidence points to the fact that the current penalties are too high, there is no reason to increase them.</p>
<p>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</p>
<p>Our family have operated a mainly Merino sheep enterprise on Dalkeith for 98 years, over that time we have expanded the area we utilise and now also run cattle. One of the drivers for expanding the size of the property is loss of Mitchell grass cover caused by thickening and encroachment of Gidgee, particularly since the 1950's. Where the Gidgee was once primarily mature trees in sparse stands with grass cover between the trees it is now dense thickets that are spreading out onto open downs country.</p> <p>We have some areas of cleared Gidgee country and it is mostly covered by a PMAV. We know from experience that cost regulates how much we can clear or re-clear. We also know that no mechanical clearing process will remove 100% of the trees. Consequently there are always trees remaining in cleared areas and there is always regrowth. It is a continuing cycle and incurs continuing costs to try to maintain the productivity of the land. There is absolutely no way that the gidgee could be eliminated. We therefore consider it unnecessary to have limits on thinning as it tends to exacerbate the cause of the problem by not allowing true restoration to a natural balance of trees and grass.</p> <p>The gidgee has invaded creek lines which were originally populated with Coolibah trees and grasses. The Coolibahs provided shade and wind protection and the grasses stabilised the banks & areas between channels. Since the invasion of gidgee into the creek lines the grasses have died out. The gidgee funnels the water flows into fast moving narrow channels that lead to accelerated erosion. Addition controls and the need for application processes inhibit restoration of creek lines to their former productive state.</p>



Gidgee invasion of creek line – Note sharp gully erosion from fast confined water.



Same creek 100 yds downstream in cleared area, Grass establishing, slowing water & erosion.



Same creek 500 yds downstream – Grass well established, channels stabilised, flow slowed.



Gidgee infestation on major creek – no grass – new channel forming between gidgee trees




Gidgee forming an outer channel – Note erosion exposing the roots of gidgee trees



Same creek without gidgee infestation – Note coolibah trees and grassy banks – natural state.

There is no other tree in this region that does as much damage to the environment as the gidgee tree. While false sandalwood sometimes multiplies prolifically, compared to gidgee it has a much lower effect on the environment and our productivity. The regulations that apply to controlling gidgee encroachment and thinning need to be as liberal as possible.

Signed:	
Address:	
Date:	20 March 2018

