



Lachlan MILLAR MP

Member for Gregory

Ms Lucy Manderson
Committee Secretary
State Development, Natural Resources and Agricultural Industry Development Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

22nd March, 2018

Dear Ms Manderson

I am writing to you to express my principled objection to the Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018. This is 38th time amendments have been proposed to the Vegetation Management Act since it was introduced in 1999. The proposed changes outlined in the Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018 will have considerable and immediate impacts for agricultural enterprises across Queensland and produce perverse environmental, social and economic outcomes.

Firstly, the proposed changes to the *Vegetation Management Act 1999* severely undermine the economic business case for the Rookwood Weir project near Rockhampton. The Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018 proposes the removal of provisions to undertake tree clearing for the purpose of developing high value agriculture and high value irrigated agriculture. This will have significant impacts for proponents of the Rookwood Weir project, which is estimated to generate an additional \$1 billion in agricultural production in Central Queensland and another 2,100 new jobs. The Rookwood Weir project is driving a number of new high value agricultural development proposals, in the Central Highlands Region. However, these aforementioned amendments, have now called these developments into question.

The Central Highlands region produces agricultural products with a gross value of \$740 million each year. The Electorate of Gregory makes a significant contribution to Queensland's \$10 billion agricultural export industry, which is the second largest in the state. The Central West alone, contributes nearly one quarter of Queensland's total exports. The value of these exports is largely derived from high value crops and irrigated crops, including cotton which are commonplace in the Central Highlands region. Removing provisions for clearing for the purpose of high value agriculture and high value irrigated agriculture from the *Vegetation Management Act 1999*, will stifle growth in the agricultural sector, undermine investment opportunities in our primary industries and compromise the significant contribution agriculture makes to the Queensland economy.

Secondly, the Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018 imposes restrictions on thinning activities and fodder harvesting. By nature, these restrictions reduce the size of the paddock and vehemently undermine the ability of primary producers to undertake vital drought-management and preparedness activities. With more than 66 per cent of Queensland still drought declared after up to seven years of unprecedented rainfall deficiencies, these proposed thinning and fodder harvesting restrictions will impose significant additional physical, mental, emotional and financial pressure on primary producers right across Queensland.

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Thirdly, I would like to make mention of the proposed changes to high value regrowth vegetation in the Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018. A large proportion of the vegetation management activities currently being undertaken in Queensland is for the purpose of maintaining previously cleared areas and for other routine vegetation management practices including the construction of fences and firebreaks. These types of vegetation management practices are conducted as part of broader land management plans devised by primary producers, which make concessions for unexpected natural disasters, fluctuations in commodity prices and other factors including financial viability, which routinely affect the operations of agricultural enterprises.

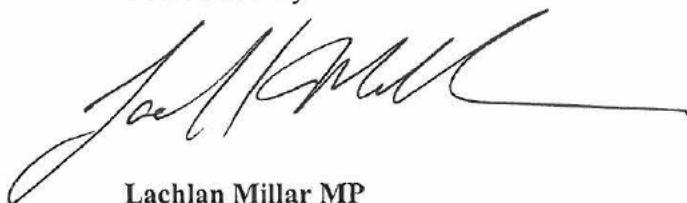
Imposing restrictions on regrowth management will significantly impact the productivity of many agricultural enterprises, right across Queensland. It is my firm belief that primary producers are best placed to manage the land on which they operate, and have significant 'skin in the game' when it comes to protecting and conserving our natural environment as their livelihoods depend on it. The provisions outlined in the Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018 for regrowth management, are akin to penalising primary producers for making sensible and responsible business management decisions. I believe that a more balanced approach to the management of regrowth is needed; one which is sensitive to the unique profile of the varying bio-regions across Queensland. This kind of approach will deliver a better balance between conservation and autonomy for stakeholders across the board.

Finally, I would like to highlight the fact that the amendments to the *Vegetation Management Act 1999* proposed in the Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018, have been drawn from the Statewide Landcover and Trees Study (SLATS). I believe the SLATS does not present an accurate representation of the vegetation management activities being undertaken in Queensland, misrepresenting incidences of regrowth, encroachment and thickening.

The proposed changes outlined in the Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018 are highly politically motivated and impose retrospective changes to the vegetation management framework in Queensland that will prohibit primary producers from developing and implementing long-term business management plans, undertaking drought-preparedness activities and improving productivity. They will also undermine economic development in some of the most geographic isolated and disadvantaged parts of Regional Queensland, in addition to placing a heavy administrative burden on primary producers.

I thank the committee for their consideration of this submission.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Lachlan Millar', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Lachlan Millar MP
Member for Gregory