

SUBMISSION – QUILPIE SHIRE COUNCIL

The Quilpie Shire Council (QSC) provide this submission in respect of the proposed Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018.

Quilpie Shire Council argues that proposed vegetation management laws will significantly impact on the ability of farmers to adequately manage land use, fodder and stock, particularly those who rely on Mulga harvesting. The proposed changes will not only result in a reduction in land carrying capacity, but will also impact on the ability to effectively manage the control of Mulga which, if allowed to regenerate to significant levels, in turn threatens other native vegetation growth.

A reduced ability to be able to manage the control of Mulga will in fact result in a less than optimal land management program for farmers, particularly in the south west area of the state. The nature of the plant requires regular management to ensure that natural ecosystems are able to continue as they have. Management practices have been used historically and without impact to the survival of the species. In fact, prior to modern farming, indigenous cultures regularly burnt the Mulga to control its growth.

Further, while it is acknowledged there will be opportunity to gain the required permissions to allow some clearing, community feedback has raised concerns that the time and costs associated with obtaining such approvals places significant impost on farmers already struggling with the ongoing drought conditions.

With long term drought conditions already resulting in serious economic downturn in rural areas, the proposed changes will not only impact farmers but all towns and communities within our council area.

Of particular concern to Council are the following issues:

1. FODDER CODE

Clause 37 (new Part 6, Division 13 – s139 ‘Revocation of particular area management plan’)

- *s139(1) – the ‘Managing Fodder Harvesting Mulga Lands Fodder Area Management Plan’ is revoked. A new revised Code is in place – ‘Managing fodder harvesting accepted development clearing code’.*
- *s139(2) - A notice of intended clearing under the Plan ceases to have effect on 8 March 2018, and no further clearing can be carried out under the Plan from 8 March 2018. Landholders need to lodge a new notification under the new Code and follow the requirements of the new Code.*
- *New s136 phases out landholder-driven area management plans as a mechanism for managing low-risk clearing that is or may be managed by the accepted development vegetation clearing codes. This new section provides that an area management plan relating to the clearing for fodder harvesting continues but only remains in force until 8 March 2020.*
- *Landholders need to lodge a new notification under the new Code.*

As outlined above, Council believes these proposed changes, in relation to mulga lands, will be detrimental to the environment and the sound management of the land.

2. LOW-RISK ACTIVITIES

Clause 17 of the Bill (new s22B 'Requirements for vegetation clearing application for managing thickened vegetation' of the Vegetation Management Act 1999) and Clause 37 (new Part 6, Division 13 – s136 'Area management plans that are to remain in force for 2 years').

- Thinning redefined as 'managing thickened vegetation' – s22A(2)(g).
- Withdrawal of Code for clearing of vegetation for thinning. Managing thickened vegetation now requires notification under the new interim Code until the Bill has passed when a development application will be required.
- Requirements to be demonstrated in a development application for managing thickened vegetation – location and extent of clearing, clearing methods, evidence restricted to prescribed regional ecosystems and restrictions and evidence that the regional ecosystem has thickened in comparison to the same regional ecosystem in the bioregion.
- New s136 phases out landholder-driven area management plans as a mechanism for managing low-risk clearing that is or may be managed by the accepted development vegetation clearing codes. This new section provides that an area management plan relating to the clearing for encroachment or thinning continues but only remains in force until 8 March 2020.
- Notification of an intention to clear vegetation made under the plan before 8 March 2018 may continue while the plan remains in force however an entity may not give notification under the plan after 8 March 2018.

Council believes the withdrawal of this code and the redefinition of "thinning" is unnecessary and will place unnecessary burden on landholders with no commensurate gain for the environment.

Signed:

Date:

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22-3-18