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Committee Secretary

State Development, Natural Resources and Agricultural Industry Development Committee

Parliament House

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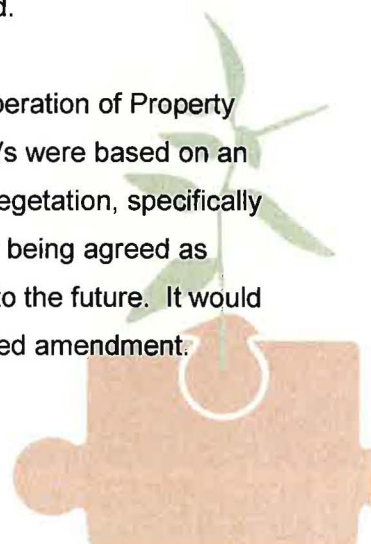
Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment bill 2018

I write to make a submission on the proposed changes to the Vegetation Management Act. By way of introduction, Forsite Forestry is a consultancy based in Innisfail, providing an advisory service to tree growers in many parts of Queensland, and interstate. To be clear, the business is focussed on reforestation, and encouraging landholders to value the trees on their land.

There are several aspects of the proposed changes which cause concern, however this submission will be limited to the parts which could impact on landholders planning to establish and manage forests. In particular, the proposed change to the definition of regrowth, and changes to the operation of PMAVs.

My understanding, from the 'Vegetation laws before parliament' document, is that the definition of "High Value Regrowth" will be changed from any vegetation on land that has not been cleared since 1990, to any vegetation on land that has not been cleared in the past 15 years. I interpret this as meaning that if the land had been cleared, say, in 1998, and the landholder had elected to allow woody vegetation to grow on the site, the government would deem it to be High Value Regrowth (Category C), and restrict the landholder's ability to manage the vegetation. There does not seem to be any associated requirement for the regrowth to have any specific floristic composition or structural form (height, canopy cover etc), only that it has not been cleared for at least 15 years. I also note that the tenure of land affected by Category C would be extended to include Freehold and Indigenous land.

Coupled with the change of definition, the amendments propose a change to the operation of Property Maps of Assessable Vegetation (PMAVs). Until now, I have understood that PMAVs were based on an agreement between the government and the landholder as to the classification of vegetation, specifically the location of boundaries between remnant and non-remnant vegetation, the latter being agreed as Category X, providing certainty to the landholder about managing the vegetation into the future. It would appear that this basic tenet of the PMAV will be specifically removed by the proposed amendment.





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If this is the intention of change, then I foresee the following perverse outcomes:

- (A) Landholders establishing plantations of native trees for timber production or livestock amenity face the risk that once the trees are more than 15 years old, the stand will become "High Value Regrowth" and the plantation owner will be restricted in their ability to implement silvicultural management to achieve their intended purpose.

Around 2010 a similar situation arose on the Atherton Tablelands when remapping of vegetation was undertaken by the department, resulting in many farm forestry plots being classified as remnant vegetation. Landholders were able to have the errors fixed by proving that the plantation was artificial, however it took considerable time and effort, and unless the landholder requested it, the error was not fixed. It is not clear whether in future, when mapping errors occur (as they certainly will), the landholder will be able to have the error changed.

- (B) Landholders entering into carbon farming arrangements do so for a permanence period of 25 or 100 years, the implication being that at the end of that term they may elect to clear the trees if that is what they choose to do. Under the proposed change, the carbon farm will become Category C High Value Regrowth, and the landholders would lose the ability to clear the land after the project ends.

While it may seem to many people that it would be a desirable outcome if the trees were retained, it would represent a serious breach of faith with the landholders who have entered into projects already; and I suspect it is likely to deter many landholders from carbon farming in the future.

- (C) Landholders who chose, for various reasons, to retain patches of regrowth vegetation on their properties will now need to be conscious that if they allow the vegetation to stand for longer than 15 years, their ability to manage the trees and that land will be restricted.

Therefore, the rational management strategy would to clear any native vegetation before it reaches 15 years of age. This would mean that the environmental services provided by trees (soil protection, nutrient cycling, climatic buffering, wildlife habitat etc) would be removed from the landscape, and in many cases trees would be cleared before they produce seed, thereby limiting the potential for regeneration in future. It would be a truly perverse outcome if this were the case.





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In each of the situations outlined, the solution would seem to be to retain PMAVs in their current form, and remove the threat of future changes to vegetation classification of land that is currently agreed to be category X.

Alternatively, a mechanism could perhaps be found to specifically identify, and exclude from future reclassification, areas planted for farm forestry (example A), allowed to regenerate for carbon farming (example B), or allowed to regenerate to achieve a specific management goal (example C).

In closing, might I simply say that given the deforestation that has occurred in Queensland in recent decades, I would hope that the government would be supportive of initiatives to increase trees in the landscape, and supportive of those landholders who consciously plant or retain native trees on their land. That being the case, I ask the committee would take on board my suggestions, to remove the risk that well-intentioned landholders would be penalised by the changes to the legislation.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "DAJ (Alex) Lindsay".

DAJ (Alex) Lindsay,

Director

Forsite Forestry

22 March 2018

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