



*Mailing Address:* PO Box 390, Gayndah Qld 4625  
*Street Address:* 34-36 Capper Street, Gayndah Qld 4625  
*Telephone:* 1300 696 272  
*Facsimile:* (07) 4161 1425  
*Email:* [admin@northburnett.qld.gov.au](mailto:admin@northburnett.qld.gov.au)  
*Web:* [northburnett.qld.gov.au](http://northburnett.qld.gov.au)  
*ABN:* 23 439 388 197

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Hon Anastacia Palaszczuk  
Premier of Queensland  
[thepremier@premiers.qld.gov.au](mailto:thepremier@premiers.qld.gov.au)

## Office of the Mayor – Cr Rachel Chambers

Dear Premier

Since the announcement of the committee for the Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Bill 2018 just two weeks ago, Queensland farmers have sought to understand both the desired intent of this bill and also its subsequent effects on Queensland.

What is evident is that there is a lot of people rushing to produce a substantial submission to the committee, due to the very short time frame given. What is crystal clear is that there hasn't not been enough time spent understanding this bill and its effects on the entire state of Queensland.

It is my belief that you think you, as Premier are doing the right thing, however giving the very people who have been actively managing their land for their livelihoods for generations, only six weeks to share their understandings and insight with you in order to ascertain the best way forward, is quite frankly offensive.

Agricultural Producers work the land, that's what they do. They rely on the quality of their land for their prosperity. No one cares more about vegetation management than primary producers. Out here, away from the city we value nature; we value the bees which pollinate our crops, we value the bugs which keep pests at bay, we value rain more than anyone may be able to comprehend and we certainly value good management of our land.

We have taken care of land for generations and will continue to do so. The unfortunate thing is, farming by its very nature (needing acreage) means we will never have enough heads or voting hands around the table with a thorough and comprehensive understanding of our issues. The understanding of parliament which represents the entirety of Queenslanders regardless of their political viewpoints comes from listening to people and seeking to understand the issues which surround them.

Politics is about the next generation. What we have now, is a shared concern and passion for delivering clean, prosperous and sustainable environments for this generation and those who follow.

In your maiden speech back in 2006, you informed the Queensland people that you will continue to argue a point that you believe has merit and put forward a solution to an issue that may not be popular.

*Address all correspondence to the Chief Executive Officer*

Well Premier, as a Mayor I also share your passion for exchanging points of view. Even though it may be uncomfortable, it is this friction and diversity of opinions which lead to the best outcomes. In this case, it is the argument which is the very thing this bill is missing.

My region is a primary producing land, that's what we do, we do it really well and we've been doing it for many generations. Please don't be fooled into thinking that any changes to us won't have changes to you and your people.

Whilst you are rightfully concerned about your population doubling in 15 years in Ipswich, we share these concerns/opportunities by planning our businesses (farms) around this data. By 2050 food production is said to need to double to meet population demand. it perplexes us as to why you are not supporting agriculture in 2018 by offering solid policies around its sustainable growth. Agriculture is the fastest growing industry in Queensland and globally Agricultural and Gastronomic Tourism is increasing in popularity year to year as consumers are wanting to discover more about where their food is coming from, and more importantly how it is sustained.

You won't find a Primary Producer who disagrees with the need for sustainable vegetation management and you won't find a Queenslander who doesn't like to eat.

I think if we had the chance to actually sit down together and fully understand each other's points of view and aspirations, we may actually be able to work out a way forward keeping all of Queensland's best interests on the table.

As an advocate for the North Burnett I am respectfully requesting an extension to the consultation time in relation to the Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Bill 2018. During this time, we would seek to understand the information (data) which has brought your government to the understanding that this Bill would be in the best interests of the State of Queensland and conversely we hope you would seek to understand our information (data) which makes us believe this bill, as is, would be of great detriment to this State.

I look forward to your response.

Yours faithfully,



Cr Rachel Chambers  
Mayor



## 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 removal of High Value Agriculture (HVA) and irrigated HVA (IHVA) affects farmers in regions differently, with those in the north particularly hard hit.

The North Burnett Regional Council area is made up of a diverse array of agricultural industries and backgrounds. Beef production on a large scale, citrus, berries, dairy, viticulture, piggeries, saw mills and countless other agricultural ventures make up the majority of the economic and employment opportunities within the region. There is also a small amount of mining within the region, yet another industry that requires being able to clear vegetation to enable best business opportunities and practices and financial prosperity.

Previous tightening of the vegetation and regrowth management regulations has had long lasting effects on both individual and state wealth. This has been caused by decreased land values, inability to expand farming businesses, prevention of land use changes and inability to carry out routine management of regrowth and woody vegetation unsuitable for farming. The shortcomings and faults pointed out above must be considered when deliberating over the proposed amendments.

Removing HVA and IHVA will affect farmers across the state in a range of different ways, but none of them positive. Having the HVA and IHVA in place for the North Burnett, allows to a certain degree for the drought proofing and stabilization of production which assists in providing a consistent supply of high value crops. This in turn aids with the ever growing demand to be filled to supply international and Australian markets. The proposed changes allow for minimal increase in clearing allowed which will greatly inhibit and negatively impact agriculture as a whole across the state of Queensland. Given the agriculture has always and will always make up such a large percentage of Queensland's economy and employment opportunities, any move to restrict or inhibit growth in this sector seems counterproductive to say the least.

The North Burnett has a current population growth of 0% according to the statistics gathered by the most recent Census data – our region is an agricultural region. If government continues to make it harder than necessary for the agricultural industry to grow by introducing laws, that are not applicable across the entire state, ours like many other agricultural regions within the state will continue to decline.

Statistics – Council understands that the State Government can measure clearing of trees in a 16 day cycle, however currently – there is no means of measuring any form of regrowth. It doesn't make sense to introduce this legislation when you cannot measure the whole picture of vegetation management. Measuring the decline, does not give the State the full picture, therefore should not alone, determine an overall answer.

It is of our opinion that State Government does not have enough sustainable evidence to ensure that the changes to the Vegetation Management Act will not adversely affect the whole of Queensland.

## 2. Retaining Self-Assessable Codes

The Amendment Bill seeks to deliver on the Government's 2017 election commitments to protect remnant and high conservation value non-remnant vegetation; amend the accepted development vegetation clearing codes to ensure they are providing appropriate protections based on Queensland Herbarium advice; and align the definition of high value regrowth vegetation with the international definition of High Conservation Value.

Science-based self-assessable codes help farmers carry out the routine vegetation management practices necessary to sustainably produce food and fibre.

The self-assessable codes help farmers ensure trees and grass stay in balance, avoid soil erosion and feed animals in drought. Farmers are not required to obtain permits for work done under the self-assessable codes, but they are required to notify the Queensland Government.

Category R would be yet another amendment to the VMA that will adversely affect agriculture in the North Burnett and right throughout Queensland. Any moves to tighten or further impose restrictions on or around riparian areas and waterways is yet to have any solid proof provided that supports its necessity or value at all. Farmers take care of their land and in particular their waterways which in so many cases provide the base of their business. To allow those areas to become uncontrolled through tighter laws would only restrict good farming practices and has no proven benefit to the reef or any evidence to suggest that it would prevent erosion. In fact, it is commonly acknowledged that grass is a far more effective preventer of erosion and soil leaching than any of the woody species that may come through increased restrictions on clearing of woody vegetation.

## 3. Other matters relevant to the Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018 that the review committee should consider appropriate and worth some consideration

Are farmers, graziers and landholders in general the environmental vandals they are made out to be by the government and environmental activist groups of today? Should restrictive vegetation management laws be tightened even further to make it even harder for them to not simply survive, but to prosper and grow their businesses? Will further tightening of these vegetation laws help increase the productivity and prosperity of this great State, as we move into a time of growing population, growing demand for high quality beef, citrus, fruit and vegetables etc. and a seemingly unquenchable demand for export quality produce grown right here in Queensland? The answer to all of these questions is No. Not now, not ever.

If the government of the day were to work with landholders at times and places of proposed clearing, the farmer would have a clearer understanding of the act and the need for increased penalties would be avoided. It would seem that increasing government ability to access and prosecute farmers and enforce larger financial penalties *seem like an underwhelming solution to the primary issue at hand*. Many studies have shown that the size of the penalty has minimal effect as a deterrent.

The proposed changes to the Vegetation Management Act (VMA) will do nothing to enhance individual or state wealth, will reduce the ability to pursue new agricultural opportunities and

generally make growing food for our nation and international markets even harder than it is today.

Sustainable farming is a term that is thrown around and seems to be on the tips of everybody's tongue, but what does that actually mean? There are thousands of farmers across Queensland who work tirelessly on their properties 365 days a year to try and ensure that they have made enough to keep their doors open for business and hopefully build a business that one day their children will want to come home and take over. If farmers are not practicing sustainable farming, then their future and their hopes of a generational business are all but dead. Why would any person deliberately and knowingly destroy their own business through improper and reckless vegetation management?

The proposed new vegetation management laws are a further unnecessary imposition that would be placed on landholders, making their already difficult and often barely profitable farming business even harder and less profitable.

One of the biggest problems facing farming today, is the fact that they aren't making any more land... What there is in land mass, is all that there will ever be! By restricting land clearing and sustainable vegetation management, the potential to feed not only our own people but those from all around the world is greatly reduced. Less or no increase in viable productive land through tightening of vegetation management will only see the Queensland economy stagnate and eventually shrivel until we are a state of entirely imported food.

If the government were to invest in properly thought out water infrastructure to provide irrigation water to fertile agricultural lands through the state, the need for land clearing would be greatly reduced as the same or greater volume of produce could be farmed more efficiently in smaller areas. Not only would this further enhance more sustainable farming practices, but it would create jobs and wealth for the state, whilst reducing the need for further land clearing so hence achieving the same desired outcome as the proposed vegetation management laws.

It is widely acknowledged that in all industries and walks of life there are people who do the wrong thing and do not follow the rules, but we do not see entire populations punished for their actions. When a drink driver is caught, he is penalized for his actions....we do not see everyone lose their license and all punished for his indiscretion.

You won't find a Primary Producer who disagrees with the need for sustainable vegetation management and you won't find a Queenslander who doesn't like to eat. Agriculture is the fastest growing industry in the country and Queensland is now the number one agricultural state in Australia. Harsh and unnecessary vegetation management restrictions put that at risk. For Queensland agriculture to maintain the number one status in the country and continue for agriculture to reach its full potential within the North Burnett and entire state of Queensland, we need governments to adopt balanced policy settings that help us move forward, not propel us backwards.

Signed:	<i>R. P. B. B. B.</i>
Address:	
Date:	<i>22-03-2018</i>