

Brigalow Beef Company



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22 March 2018

Submission to Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018

I completely oppose the proposed changes contained in the Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018 ("the Bill").

My wife and I operate a beef breeding, backgrounding, and fattening operation across two properties, totalling 31,651 hectares in Central Queensland. We are a young couple, 39 and 37 years of age, with three young children. We are proud of what we do, proud to operate our own business and stand on our own two feet, and proud to be owners of our property "Wallaroo".



We purchased "Wallaroo" in 2013, it was a very big step for us and our business, up until this point we only operated on a leased property. We operate nearly entirely on borrowed capital and hold a very small equity position. We purchased a property with enormous amounts of potential, but it was in a poor condition when we purchased it. We knew we were buying a lifetime of hard work but we also knew it was our best opportunity to ever purchase a property of our own and to provide an opportunity for our children to also have a future in agriculture if they should wish.

Should the proposed changes in the Bill be adopted, our families operation will be significantly affected in a negative way, potentially jeopardising our ability to remain financially viable. When the Beattie Government first introduced restrictive Vegetation Management legislation, it significantly reduced "Wallaroo's" potential productivity. Everyone who visits our property comments about the potential and what could have been had previous owners been more consciences at managing regrowth and timber encroachment. As much as we find it disappointing and frustrating, we knew this when we purchased the property in 2013. For the properties potential to be further reduced by the changes proposed in the amendment Bill is shattering.

When we purchased the property in 2013 it was not covered by a PMAV. We immediately began investigated locking one in, however the proposed map was not acceptable to us. There were many, many locations where the map was inaccurate and large areas were incorrectly mapped. It was suggested to us by the relevant Government department that we needed to lodge an application for a "Detailed PMAV" and "provide data to demonstrate the errors in the current mapping and provide suggested new mapping". All of this was acceptable to us, until I was informed as to the level of detail that the department would require us to provide. We were told we would need a consultant with relative skills and experience to put together the application. I approached multiple contractors to discuss the process and likely costs. Costs ranged from a best case scenario of \$20,000 to in excess of \$100,000 to put the application together. We COULD NOT AND STILL CAN NOT afford such a cost. Hence no detailed PMAV application has progressed. In fear of what was likely to happen with future changes in legislation, we decided to accept the PMAV on offer (with its inaccuracies), and hope that one day when we can afford it we shall engage the consultants and submit an application for amendment. Fortunately given we chose to get a PMAV we are offered some protection from the current amendments. I shudder to think what some of my neighbours are going to say when they realise just how affected that have been by these proposed changes. I know of a property in our area that will see nearly all (90%) of its potential lost to the reintroduction of Category C High Value Regrowth. The proposed changes will render that property nearly valueless. I couldn't imagine seeing my life's work, my most valuable and significant asset, completely lost. I feel for those people – AND SO SHOULD YOU!

If the State of Queensland wishes to lock up areas of land, and prevent them from being developed, they should compensate the landholder for the loss, or alternatively purchase the land area on the open market. To do otherwise is THEFT. Government Orchestrated and Condoned THEFT is something I associate with foreign dictatorships, not an elected government in a developed, civilised and democratic country such as Australia.

The proposed changes around the thinning of vegetation and the management of timber encroachment significantly impact on our business's viability, and greatly reduce the value of our asset, all with zero compensation. That is not acceptable to either my wife or myself. "Wallaroo" is in excess of 70% remnant, undisturbed vegetation. The freehold portion is 19,502ha and is covered by one (singular) lot and plan (Lot 4 on WT323). Approx. 12,000ha of this is remnant. Under the proposed amendments we will be limited to managing the timber encroachment and thickening to only 400ha or 3%. While other people on smaller lots will be entitled to thin an area of up to 10%. This is not equitable nor viable, nor environmentally responsible. Locking up country and removing all management is not going to achieve environmental outcomes. We are being disadvantaged just because we have a larger lot. To be honest I still don't accept a 10% cap as being workable. It is critical that Vegetation Management Legislation is practicable, viable and workable. It needs to be specific to regions and ecosystems. The one size fits all approach does not work.

We and the previous owners of "Wallaroo" voluntarily chose to preserve areas of timber. We made voluntary decisions that are consistent with supposed outcomes desired by Government, and yet we are penalised for making them. The proposed bill penalises people who have done the right thing, while rewarding people who may have done the reverse. That surely can't be good policy.

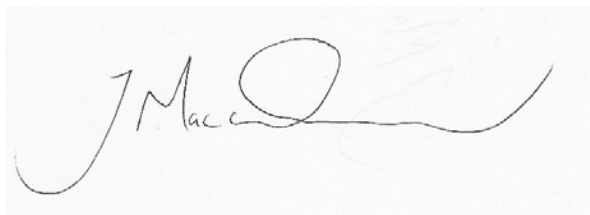
The most frustrating part of our situation is that we feel completely vilified by the current State Government. Many of the supposed justifications for the legislation are based on inaccuracies and ill-informed or blatantly dishonest assertions. We derive our income from the productivity of the land. My ability to meet the financial needs of my family hinge on my ability to successfully manage the environment in which I live. I am motivated every day to ensure that my property is the best land condition possible to ensure my long term viability. My wife and I borrowed in excess of \$3.5 million to purchase "Wallaroo" and the suggestion that I would let or want the top soil to run-off my property and damage the Great Barrier Reef is absurd and insulting. I can't afford to loose soil, and in fact we manage our land with the intention of increasing ground cover and building soil.

There is a lot that Governments can, should and could do to reduce sediment run-off to the Great Barrier Reef or reduce atmospheric carbon levels, however it requires WORKING WITH farmers not persecuting them. Farmers are land managers, that's what we do every day. We don't charge anyone for doing it, we invest our own money and in fact, we borrow more money at our expense to invest in land management practices. Farmers are the greatest and most powerful tool available to decision makers if they are genuinely concerned with land management or seeking environmental outcomes. You can't achieve environmental outcomes if you work against, persecute, alienate and vilify the majority of land managers.

I strongly encourage all members of the Queensland Parliament to oppose the proposed bill. To do so doesn't mean you don't support the supposed environmental outcomes, it just means you don't support or have confidence in this bill's effectiveness in achieving them. Queenslanders hear a lot about; "improving food security", "promoting development in rural and regional Queensland", and "developing Northern Australia" and yet the proposed bill is inconsistent with all of these statements. Each and every member of Queensland Legislative Assembly has pledged "that they will well and truly serve the people of Queensland and faithfully perform their duties and responsibilities to the best of their ability and according to law". I would urge members to consider their promise when voting on this piece of legislation.

In addition to our grazing enterprise we also operate an Eco-Tourism business; "Wallaroo Outback Retreat". This business celebrates and shares the ecology, flora, fauna, cultural heritage and property development with visitors. We can accommodate 16 guests in well-appointed glamping accommodation. We would happily open the facilities free of charge to any Members of Parliament and their families, should they wish to come and learn about our environment, and to see firsthand the potential impacts of this legislation. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss any aspects of the proposed bill, the impacts on our operation, demonstrate how limiting it is on our productivity, and how flawed it is in achieving the desired outcomes. We firmly believe it would be unjust for Members of Parliament to vote on this Legislation without fully understanding the potential impacts, and if Pauline and I can assist in any way to providing some level of understanding by opening our business and home we would be only too happy to do so.

Yours faithfully

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

Justin MacDonnell