SUBMISSION

I provide my submission in respect of the proposed Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018 to be included in the SDNRAIDC's detailed consideration.

In providing this submission I refer directly to the Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018, the Introductory Speech of the Hon Dr Anthony Lynham MP (Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy) on 8 March 2018, and the Explanatory Notes that encompass the proposed changes to the above Acts and a range of commentary and issues.

In my opinion the Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018 proposed changes are oppressive, restrictive, and onerous, and do not reflect the expert knowledge and understanding that landholders hold after decades of sustainable land management. In particular, the changes pertaining to fodder harvesting/farming in the Mulga Lands of western Queensland as outlined below:

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.**

Introductory Speech - Dr Lynham: *"In conjunction with this bill, I asked my department to progress the review of the revised fodder code on which we consulted in 2016 and commence a rolling program to revise and implement the other acceptable development codes throughout 2018. The revised managing fodder harvesting code has been developed by my department based on scientific input from the Queensland Herbarium and the CSIRO. The immediate remake of the managing fodder harvesting and the managing thickened vegetation codes will invalidate all previous clearing notifications and introduce for the first time size and time limits on the areas able to be notified for clearing under an accepted development code. My department will be consulting throughout 2018 with stakeholders to finalise the remaining codes."*

Explanatory Notes: Revoking the Mulga Lands Fodder Area Management Plan reinforces the role and function of the accepted development vegetation clearing code for fodder harvesting being the supported mechanism in which low-risk clearing activities are undertaken. Landholders can continue to undertake self-assessable clearing under the accepted development vegetation clearing code for fodder harvesting, or alternatively, apply for a development permit under the Planning Act 2016.

The two year period recognises that, in some instances, the clearing requirements for encroachment, thinning and fodder harvesting under current area management plans may not be consistent with the best available science.

The proposed new code is not only impractical and shows a complete lack of understanding of the ecology of the region and industry they seek to regulate. This will erode the ability of graziers in the Mulga Lands to manage their properties in a sustainable and viable manner. In some cases, these changes will be result in rural business becoming completely unviable in the future. The main two issues with the new code are:

- Limiting the area allowed to be utilised for fodder;
- Restricting the pulling of strips of timber.

Limiting area allowed to be utilised for fodder harvesting:

The new code limits the area available to be harvested to 500ha, which includes retention strips. This restriction makes little if any sense with no consideration for property/lot sizes. This effectively only allows for the use of 200ha of fodder per lot as 300ha must be retention strips. With many mulga lots (properties) in excess of 20,000ha it allows for less than 1% of the property's fodder resources to be utilised. This would result in up to 90% of the property not being able to be utilised to its potential, assuming the regeneration cycle post-harvest is 10 years and mulga is harvested every year.

The above assumptions do not recognise nor show any comprehension for the way mulga fodder is in utilised in the rural operations. Mulga is harvested in dry years (for example 1991-1995; 2002-2006; 2013-present) and in wet years the fodder is generally left to regenerate. The regeneration is actively encouraged by graziers as an effective drought management strategy and sustainability system for their rural business operation. Hence, an annual restriction is a very crude limitation to place on the practise of harvesting fodder.

'Green groups' have been vocal in their claims of increased clearing in the mulga lands since the introduction of Newman government changes. However, these claims are made without any recognition (nor understanding) that the increased rate of clearing is attributable to sustained drought periods experienced in these areas at the same time as the Newman government changes and are a coincidence in timing rather than demonstrative of causation. It is not difficult to correlate the increased clearing for fodder and below average rainfall years throughout time, along with decrease in clearing rates for fodder and regeneration of mulga that occurs in above average rainfall years. This process has occurred for the past 150 years in the Mulga Lands and if the 'green groups' were correct in their assertion that western Queensland landholders are destroying their environment and that mulga farming/harvesting was unsustainable this debate would currently be null and void as there would not be a mulga tree left in western Queensland to protect.

It can be argued that from an environmental perspective the management of the mulga fodder resource in this way results in more carbon being captured from the environment or in the worst case no net difference. This is because young, growing mulga trees are net carbon capturing plants while mature trees do not capture additional carbon. While it may be argued the felled trees release their

carbon as they decompose (as long as they are not burnt) this occurs over an long period of time in which case the carbon captured by the new growth more than offsets this release of carbon.

A more suitable and workable code would allow clearing based on a percentage of the total lot size over a five or ten-year cycle. Fodder code could be based on maximum of 10% of the lot per annum to a maximum of 50% of the lot over a ten-year cycle. That would give landholders the ability to sustainably manage their business whilst preventing destruction of the Mulga Lands.

Restriction on pulling fodder

I have been involved in the grazing in the Mulga Lands for over 30 years and my family has been involved in the western Queensland grazing system since the early 1900s with our holdings (properties) having seen all types of Mulga harvesting from mulga cutting axe teams to pulling mulga between two bulldozers. Based on my experience, pulling of fodder is the most efficient harvesting process and the best method for promotion of regeneration of the resource. This method results in the resource recovering/regrowing up to twice as quickly as thinning the resource. From an environmental point of view, it also allows for the retained, remnant areas to be preserved in a natural state.

In an attempt to highlight the regrowth at different stages in the areas that has been harvested for fodder, attached are a series of photos which seek to illustrate and educate those less familiar with fodder harvesting practises of the Mulga Lands:

Figure 1: Harvesting History - pulled in 1970 (note the mature tree present); pushed in 1990s (note the young mulga regrowth)

Figure 2: Harvesting History – cut via axe in 1960s

Figure 3: Harvesting History – Area pulled in 2006

Figure 4: Harvesting History – Area pulled in 2015 (note the seedling mulga in the foreground).

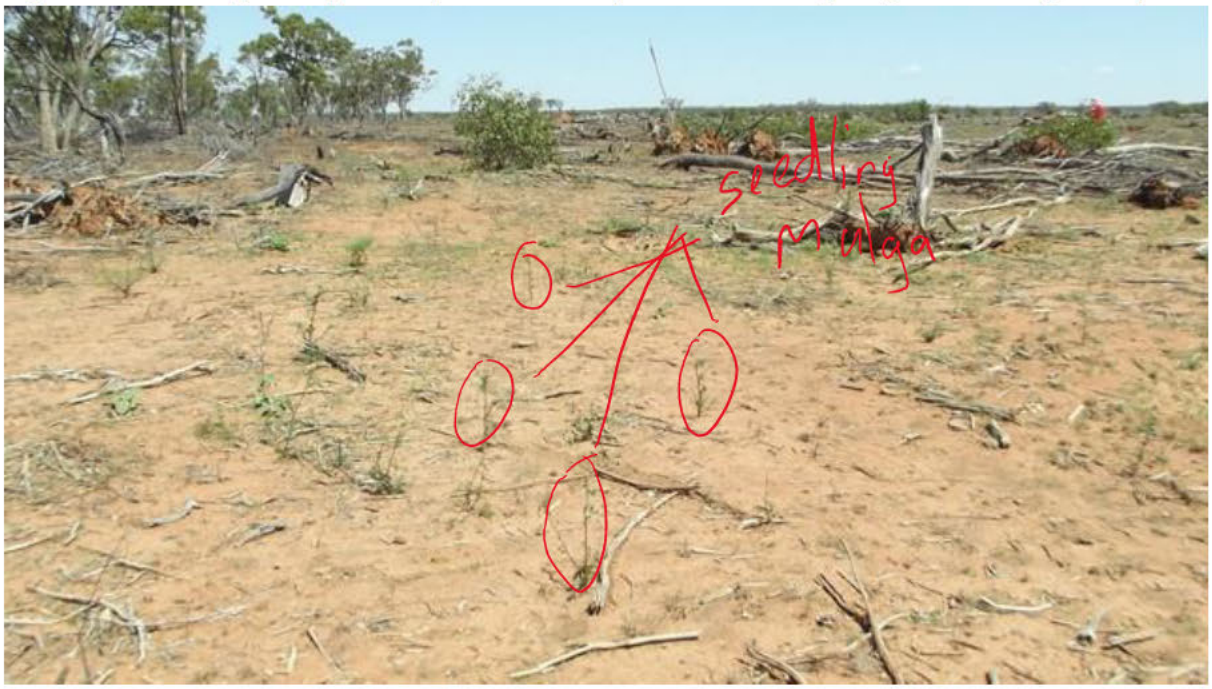
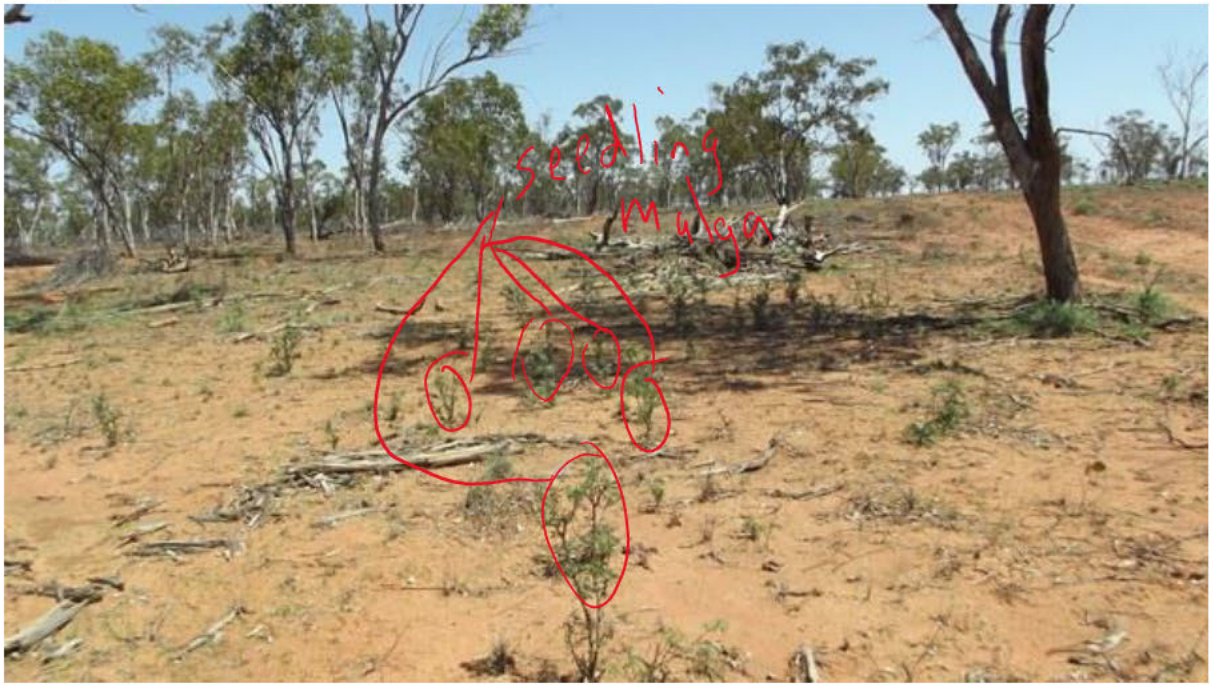


Figure 5: Harvesting History – pushed strips 2005 (note there is regrowth in pushed strip in foreground)



Comparing figures 3 and 5 (which were cleared within a similar period of time - 2005 and 2006) the rate of regrowth is significantly greater in the pulled area. Hence, ideally pulling strip of up to 150 metres and leaving 200 metres of remnant vegetable would provide a better balance.

As previously stated mulga trees are a vital fodder source in western Queensland and have been utilised in the Mulga Lands since the land was originally settled for grazing. These areas have a long history of the trees being harvested for fodder for livestock, particularly in periods of extend low rainfall. These same areas are left then to regenerate by landholders for future use as a forage source. Traditionally, this process has been termed 'harvesting', but it is more akin to farming with the rotation taking to 10 to 20 years (depending on season conditions and harvesting methods).

Hopefully, in this submission I have highlighted the history of fodder harvesting in the Mulga Lands and its importance to the graziers that utilise the resource. The graziers in these areas depend on mulga as a sustainable, long term business strategy and acknowledge that broad-scale, indiscriminate clearing is not a sustainable business model – which is clearly evidenced by the volume of mulga remaining in western Queensland today.

The proposed vegetation management changes appear to have been an uninformed reaction to a snapshot of the region (that is, action is required as a result of increased clearing rates since Newman government legislative changes) with no critical analysis of other more relevant and impacting conditions (specifically, the extended drought period for this same area for the same period of time). It is a flawed rationale to judge clearing rates (for fodder purposes) by comparing the past five years of continued below average rainfall to the clearing rates in a period of average to above average rainfall years (2007-2013). Please refer to Table 1 below.

Table 1. Rainfall at Charleville over the past 11 years. (Source: BOM)

	Location: Charleville Airport
Mean rainfall	488mm
5-year average 2013-2017	364mm
6-year average 2007-2012	610mm

The Mulga Lands have a long history of sustainable grazing by landholders and the proposed changes would have a serious detrimental effect on landholders' viability in the Mulga Lands region. The proposed legislation needs to be revised to allow graziers to continue their sustainable use of mulga as a fodder source. As for the so called '*scientific input from the Queensland Herbarium and the CSIRO*' they need to put their feet on the ground and consult with landholders who have been sustainably managing these regional ecosystems for the past 150 years. It is not good enough for them to provide advice based on desktop assessments of clearing rates from satellite imagery with no critical analysis of contributing factors, nor prevailing conditions. This approach focuses solely on the pulling of mulga whilst neglecting the other half of the production system, specifically the regeneration of the mulga. Such a one-sided and incomplete analysis can only lead to poor decision making.

Signed:	
Date:	20/03/2018