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SUBMISSION

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMMENDMENT BILL 2018

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Introduction

The need for a sound, scientifically based vegetation management system is clear, because

- Our land must be scientifically managed. Scientific land management is essential for sustainable production which is essential for on-going farm profitability. Yes, most farmers seek to manage their land well but without a clear set of science based standards, which are continuously improved, they may not be managing the land optimally.
- Increasingly demanding consumer requirements must be met, especially if we are to move into higher-value speciality, niche markets. This move is needed to enable Qld beef exports to cope with low cost commodity beef from Brazil, India and other developing nations.
- Any land management legislation must be as close to politically bi-partisan as possible so as to avoid changes to legislation with every change of government. Certainty is essential for long term farm investment.
- Land management legislation needs to be such that it is accepted by the majority of farmers; otherwise it will never be bi-partisan and will never be properly implemented. The Sugar Cane Best Practice system is a good example of what can be achieved and this is a clear win-win system in that its implementation gives reduced costs for farmers, higher cane production and better environmental outcomes.
- The vegetation management legislation enacted under the former Newman LNP Government was not based on international standards, as stated by the then Minister Andrew Cripps, when asked a question at a Rural Press Club meeting. It is important that farm environment management systems are third party audited and be based on international standards. This is to be able to prove to international consumers, or to supermarkets etc overseas, that our farms are run sustainably and to ensure that our farm management systems are based on the most recent scientific information. For example, the Qld Sugar Cane Best Practice system is based on the Bonsucro international system.
- Some in the Australian beef production sector have expressed concern at standards such as in the Global Roundtable for Sustainable Beef system and they say that third party external system auditing is not needed. Key points that can be made here include:
 - Large beef processors such as JBS are on the management board for the Global Roundtable. If such large cattle purchasers demand such standards there is little alternative.
 - It is assumed, given the calibre of the other board members of the Global Roundtable, that this system is based on sound science. If so, what is the problem? If there are gaps in the science, these can be pointed out.
 - Being accredited to such an international standard may well give our beef a marketing edge with increasingly discerning customers.

Conclusions from Current Media

Recent stories about land management in the media that suggest that more consultation and discussion is needed include:

- JCU study finds environmentally friendly cattle farm makes more money, FarmonLine 15 March 2018.
- Palaszczuk delivers new anti-farmer vegetation laws, FarmonLine 8 March 2018.
- Fears of vegetation management laws reintroduced in Queensland Parliament, FarmonLine 8 March 2018.
- Amby grazier Peter Jolliffe says thickening vegetation more destructive than clearing, FarmonLine 6 March 2018.
- Farmers for Climate Action press government for water and land changes, FarmonLine 6 March 2018.
- Bad policy hurts growers, FarmonLine 20 March 2018.
- Vegetation management laws could impact Rookwood Weir, FarmonLine 16 March 2018.
- Charleville grazier Scott Sargood launches petition against vegetation management laws, FarmonLine, 27 February 2018.
- Productivity vs biodiversity: it's closer than you think, FarmonLine, 13 February 2018.
- Vegetation management: Map errors increase farmer's frustrations, FarmonLine, 5 February 2018.
- Charleville producers Scott ad Adma Sargood reliant on mulga during dry times, FarmonLine, 31 January 2018.
- Tree clearing laws are failing Qld, say academics, FarmonLine 29 January 2018.

Recommendations

- There is sufficient disagreement on the proposed legislation for a very much longer consultation period to be required. Yes, this proposed legislation was an election commitment but there is no special urgency. Getting it right is critical.
- A public forum is needed so that the science behind the proposals can be presented and discussed. This may well need at least one day for such a complex situation. The proceedings from such a forum need to be made public.
- The peer review report from CSIRO needs to be in the public domain if not so already.
- The link between the proposed vegetation management legislation and the work being done by CSIRO and several universities on precision grazing needs to be made clear.
- The link between the proposed legislation and international vegetation classifications must be made clear.
- The link between the proposed legislation and international standards systems must be made clear. Such international standards systems include:
 - Global Reporting Institute, See <https://www.globalreporting.org/Pages/default.aspx>.
 - IDH, a sustainable trade initiative, see <http://www.idhsustainabletrade.com/>
 - The Global GAP (Good Agricultural Practice) movement started by European supermarkets. See http://www.globalgap.org/uk_en/.
 - The Global Roundtable for Sustainable Beef, <http://grsbeef.org/>.

Supplementary Comments

Personal observations while driving around regional Australia suggest that much pasture is over grazed and much has significant weed infestation. Driving in far west Qld also showed that many creeks had significant silting problems, presumably due to erosion.

This debate on vegetation management could be used as an opportunity to better promote the grazing land management systems being developed to improve pastures as part of a productivity improvement program. These grazing system projects include:

- The Australian Sustainable Beef Framework, <https://www.sustainableaustralianbeef.com.au/>
- Pastures from Space, <http://www.pasturesfromspace.csiro.au/>
- The Qld Agriculture Department has a range of beef industry programs, see <https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/animal-industries/beef>
- Some consulting companies have sustainability programs, see <http://www.precisiongrazing.com/>.