

## **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, of 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.

I do not in any way support broad scale land clearing or land degradation however I do not support and cannot operate with our industry being heavily regulated and debilitated by new oppressive vegetation management laws.

My opinion is set out below:-

## HIGH-VALUE REGROWTH

Clause 38 of the Bill (proposed new definition of '*high-value regrowth*' (a) and (b) in Schedule (Dictionary) of the *Vegetation Management Act 1999*) and Clause 16 (omission of s22A(2)(k) and (l) to delete *high-value agriculture clearing* and *irrigated high-value agriculture clearing* as relevant purposes).

- Changing the definition of *high-value regrowth* vegetation - this term will now apply to vegetation not cleared in the last 15 years - rather than since 31 December 1989 (28 year old trees).
- Regulating regrowth on freehold land, Indigenous land and occupational licences in addition to leasehold land for agriculture and grazing.
- Removal of high value agriculture and irrigated high value agriculture as a relevant purpose under the *Vegetation Management Act 1999*. This will remove the ability to apply for a development approval for clearing for high-value and irrigated high value agriculture.

Introductory Speech - Dr LYNHAM: *"I would like to draw the attention of the House specifically to the removal of provisions that allowed for clearing for high-value agriculture and irrigated high-value agriculture.....The bill will reinstate the protection of high-value regrowth vegetation on freehold and Indigenous land. The bill will change the definition of 'high-value regrowth' to ensure that additional vegetation that has significant environmental value is protected.....it is proposed to change the 'high-value regrowth' definition that currently exists from woody vegetation that has not been cleared since 31 December 1989 and forms an endangered, of concern or least concern regional ecosystem vegetation to high-value regrowth vegetation that has not been cleared for 15 years.....Under the new definition, high-value regrowth will continue to be mapped as category C on freehold and Indigenous land, as well as on leasehold land, that is, agriculture and grazing leases. Restoring the pre-2013 mapping of high-value regrowth on freehold and Indigenous land protects approximately 630,000 hectares on freehold and Indigenous land.....With the changes I am proposing to the definition of 'high-value regrowth', our government will protect an additional 232,275 hectares. These two measures will protect an additional 862,506 hectares of high-value regrowth. Importantly for the environment, approximately 405,000 hectares or 47 per cent of this is within the Great Barrier Reef catchments."*

\*NB: A landholder could previously apply for a development approval to broadscale clear remnant vegetation for high value agriculture (clearing carried out to establish, cultivate and harvest crops) or irrigated high value agriculture (clearing carried out to establish, cultivate and harvest crops, or pasture, that will be supplied with water by artificial means).

The change from being able to management encroachment in country untouched for 28 years to 15 years hinders the ability of landowners to help soil health on recently acquired/purchased properties. Through no fault of their own, recently purchased properties that have not had soil cared for through vegetation management for more than 15 years will be exempt from vegetation management under the new act. Despite good intentions to selectively thin thickened vegetation, this process is time and cost prohibitive, thus there will be many properties affected that desperately need to have vegetation managed. As a result, less ground cover will be able to establish - resulting in soil erosion and waterway pollution from sediment.

#### NEAR-THREATENED SPECIES

Clause 37 of the Bill (new Part 6, Division 13 - s141 'Proposed map showing essential habitat' and s142 'Provision about essential habitat').

- A map showing areas of proposed essential habitat for protected wildlife and near threatened wildlife will be published and land will be covered by an area management plan.

Introductory Speech - Dr LYNHAM: *"Importantly, our government will be providing better protections under the vegetation management framework for near-threatened species. These are species that are listed under the Nature Conservation Act 1994, where our scientists have evidence that the population size or distribution of the wildlife is small, may become smaller or has declined and there is concern for their survival. Our near-threatened plants and animals were dismissed by the LNP government as not worthy of protection. On the other hand, the Labor party is of the firm belief that these species need our protection, otherwise we face the regretful prospect of their decline. Near-threatened species were removed from the essential habitat mapping layer in 2013. When we compared the high conservation values' methodology to the existing statutory framework, it showed that near-threatened species have limited regulatory protection. The essential habitat mapping layer used in the Vegetation Management Act will be updated, protecting endangered, vulnerable and near-threatened species. The essential habitat of our valued animals and plants will be protected in both remnant and high-value regrowth vegetation. Offsets will apply to approvals for any significant residual impact on near-threatened species where the clearing of remnant vegetation cannot be reasonably avoided and minimised."*

Strict laws need to be imposed on developers undertaking broad scale clearing of fragile, virgin woodlands in the south east corner. However, the current vegetation act adequately governs how regrowth is managed in regional Australia. If councils and housing developers were subject to - at minimum - this level of regulation, our precious wildlife and native flora would not be susceptible to the environmental devastation currently affecting coastal habitats. Areas around Toowoomba, the Sunshine Coast and Gold Coast are being cleared at an alarming rate with no thought to native wildlife or soil preservation.

Yet on the other hand, our farmers are being persecuted for small scale selective thinning of thickened regrowth and vegetation. By allowing corridors of timber and ensuring good ground cover, our native plants and animals are being provided for.

Any species of flora or fauna would have to be recorded by an expert IN THE FIELD WHO SETS FOOT ON PROPERTY instead of desktop modelling - as this is hugely inaccurate. If people's livelihoods and entire industries rely on this information, it had better be correct.

Also, there has been no information provided about where and how to find these new maps. This information needs to be provided ASAP.

#### REGROWTH VEGETATION IN WATERCOURSE AREAS

Clause 37 of the Bill (new Part 6, Division 13 - s133 'How definition regrowth watercourse and drainage feature area applies during and after the interim period') and addition to *regrowth watercourse and drainage feature area* definition in the Schedule (Dictionary) of the *Vegetation Management Act 1999*

- Extension of Category R areas (from the Burdekin, Mackay Whitsunday and Wet Tropics Great Barrier Reef catchments) to include new catchments to encompass all Great Barrier Reef catchments
- Addition of three catchments - the Burnett-Mary, eastern Cape York and Fitzroy catchments - affecting regrowth vegetation in areas located within 50m of a watercourse or drainage feature located in these additional catchments.
- This regulation applies across freehold, indigenous and leasehold land.

Introductory Speech - Dr LYNHAM: "This bill will also extend protection to regrowth vegetation in watercourse areas for the Burnett-Mary, eastern Cape York and Fitzroy catchments, providing consistent protection to regrowth vegetation in all Great Barrier Reef catchments. This builds on the measures introduced in 2009 which regulate the clearing of vegetation within 50 meters of a watercourse in the Burdekin, Mackay-Whitsunday and Wet Tropics. The bill will also amend the Water Act to re-regulate the removal of vegetation in a watercourse under a riverine protection permit."

Explanatory Notes: Expanding the regulation of riverine regrowth to include these catchments will increase the protection for the Great Barrier Reef from sediment run-off and other impacts of clearing.

The amount of bare ground between thickened vegetation is SIGNIFICANTLY more than that covered by grasses and interspersed with trees, as most of the country currently managed by selective thinning of thickened vegetation is. If we stop being allowed to control regrowth, the amount of bare soil will be hugely increased.

In the event of rain, this will result in HUGE sediment run-off, contributing to the destruction of the Great Barrier Reef and the silting up of waterways. Being able to manage regrowth, means we are able to grow grass which holds the soil together, it is a very simple concept.

#### LOW-RISK ACTIVITIES

Clause 17 of the Bill (new s22B 'Requirements for vegetation clearing application for managing thickened vegetation' of the *Vegetation Management Act 1999*) and Clause 37 (new Part 6, Division 13 - s136 'Area management plans that are to remain in force for 2 years').

- Thinning redefined as '*managing thickened vegetation*' - s22A(2)(g).
- Withdrawal of Code for clearing of vegetation for thinning. *Managing thickened vegetation* now requires notification under the new interim Code until the Bill has passed when a development application will be required.
- Requirements to be demonstrated in a development application for managing thickened vegetation - location and extent of clearing, clearing methods, evidence restricted to prescribed regional ecosystems and restrictions and evidence that the regional ecosystem has thickened in comparison to the same regional ecosystem in the bioregion.
- 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 encroachment or thinning continues but only remains in force until 8 March 2020.
- Notification of an intention to clear vegetation made under the plan before 8 March 2018 may continue while the plan remains in force however an entity may not give notification under the plan after 8 March 2018.

Introductory Speech - Dr LYNHAM: "The government is committed to retaining accepted development codes for low-risk activities, while ensuring they deliver appropriate protections.....Following a review by the Queensland Herbarium, and subsequent review by the CSIRO, a decision was reached that thinning is not a low-risk activity. Therefore I intend to withdraw this accepted development code from the regulation once this bill commences. In the interim, I am remaking the code to include the best scientific advice on how to minimise the risks until the code can be withdrawn. I will retain an assessment pathway in the legislation for those landholders who need to manage thickened vegetation. It will remain a relevant purpose in the *Vegetation Management Act* for which development applications can be made."

Having to lodge a development application and receive approval will impede farmers abilities to control encroachment and regenerate lands. The time taken for any turn-around of correspondence generally slow. Also, if this country has already been approved to manage, why double/triple/quadruple the process?

Creating jobs for someone behind a desk in Brisbane is not a good enough reason.

These codes - as approved by the DNRME in the past - should remain completely self-assessable, allowing graziers to work in time frames that are practical.

## 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.



As we own country in a Mulga Belt, we would be devastated by the removal of our ability to use Mulga as a fodder when necessary. We employ very conservative stocking rates, rest and rotate our paddocks, and match stocking rate to carrying capacity. However, in the event of this 1 in 100 year drought, Mulga was a necessary fodder to keep stock alive when there was no market for them.

Very little to no grass grows under Mulga trees, and thinning this country to allow stock to eat the leaves also allows plants to grow between the trees. This preserves the integrity of the soil.

#### PENALTY UNIT INCREASES

Clauses 19, 22-23 and 25-33

- Various amendments to Penalty Units for Maximum Penalty. Eg. s54B(5) 'Non-compliance with Restoration notice' - penalty increasing from 1665 to 4500 penalty units and s58(1) (false or misleading statement) - increasing from 50 to 500 penalty points.

Increasing the harness of penalties is unnecessary. The penalties are already severe, and prohibitive to farmers.

#### OTHER RELEVANT MATTERS

Introductory Speech - Dr LYNHAM: *"I believe this bill and the complementary measures that I have outlined will deliver on the election commitment to deliver a more sustainable vegetation management framework for Queensland. This government will continue to work with our vital agricultural sector so that together we can care for the environment and ensure that their farms can pass, in good condition and in safe hands, from generation to generation."*

*"The amendments that I bring into the parliament are necessary to protect Queensland's remnant and high-value regrowth vegetation. It is all about restoring a sustainable vegetation management framework for managing a valuable resource on behalf of the people of Queensland."*

*"Within three years in Queensland clearing rates of remnant native vegetation increased from 59,800 hectares in 2012-13 to 138,000 in 2015-16. This amendment bill seeks to end the levels of broadscale clearing that the LNP legislation created."*

The proposed changes to the vegetation act has the potential to decrease the productivity on Greenoaks by 80%. This would financially cripple the enterprise.

I employ very sustainable grazing practices on the property, and have worked tirelessly in the 5 years of owning it to improve the health and biodiversity of the environment. I have done this through fencing, water improvements, and selectively thinning encroaching vegetation while planting grasses and legumes.

We have grass growing on barren clay pans that haven't grown plants for decades. We are managing run off through the planting and growth of perennial grasses and legumes in places where there was only bare dirt before. We are working to put nitrogen back in the soil with planted legumes, and carbon back in the soil with planted grasses.

In areas where regrowth has thickened, grass has diminished to less than 20% of ground cover, which threatens the integrity of the soil. It is noted that in timbered areas such as this, there are significant areas of erosion, as opposed to areas where the timber has been managed. In these areas there is more 80% ground cover.

We care for the native flora and fauna, and leave the environment as untouched as possible when legally reducing thickened regrowth under the current act. We do this in stages to allow native species of animals to continue to thrive.

We recommend revising your proposed Act with consultation from AgForce as an industry body.

Signed:



Date:

22/03/18