

SUBMISSION

I provide my submission on rejection of the changes proposed in the Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018 ("the Bill").

This constant change in legislation severely impacts on the ability of farm managers to plan and implement effective long-term property and business management decisions. Ecological processes work in much longer timeframes and can be severely compromised when mismatching regulations are enforced. Farmers have long called for certainty with the vegetation management regulatory framework. I am totally opposed to continued uncertainty and attacks on the viability of myself, the long-term sustainability of my business as well as attacks on fellow farmers.

The impacts of the proposed changes to the Vegetation Management Act include;

- The purpose for High Value Agriculture and Irrigated High Value Agriculture will be removed.
- Extends Category B areas (remnant vegetation) and Category C (regrowth vegetation) to freehold land, and indigenous freehold land. Additional 862 000ha High Value Regrowth and water course buffers to all reef catchment, Burnett Mary, Fitzroy, Eastern Cape York.
- Thinning will require Development Application to be lodged for approval.
- The purpose for High Value Agriculture and Irrigated High Value Agriculture will be removed.

Describe the impacts the changes will make to stall agriculture, discourage investment, and increase costs and time to manage vegetation.

Our Business

We operate a beef cattle breeding operation at Wyoming Station east of Charleville. We purchased our property in 2001, our chance to own our own first start cattle station, with the intention of improving and developing its run-down state as we could afford to with both time and financial constraints. The life-long dream. Since then drought has impacted heavily on our financial ability to get in and do the work we wanted and by the time we are now ready to do so, the vegetation regulations have changed again, so much so it now severely impacts our ability to do the work and increase the production we had planned. The ultimate result is we are not compensated for the impact this will have on our business or the devaluation of our land. We pay a mortgage, higher interest than a home owner but we cannot effectively make our freehold property as productive as it could be. Let down by the fact that we have not had the capital as others have done to get in and clear our land before the rules have changed once again. It is the equivalent of telling someone that their \$1 million house and land package they bought in inner Brisbane with intentions of renovating and making it into a \$2 million masterpiece, the increased value they had envisaged would be the retirement plan and then getting told that they cannot renovate nor could they maintain any of the weeds and trees on the property. They would be squealing from the rooftops.

Harvesting

Harvesting and low browse of the fodder species tree 'Mulga' is part of everyday grazing operations on our property and for much of SW Queensland. Mulga is our haystack. It is our grass when it is too hot and dry to grow any. It is our grass when we are met with plagues of kangaroos sweeping through taking all our available grassland left, making controlling grazing pressure extremely difficult. Mulga is the silver lining that SW Queensland has for the drought times. When

the rest of the state is destocked or very close, which is how it is currently for most of central west and north west Queensland, with careful management and the supplementary feeding of cattle to assist digesting the tannins in the leaf, the Mulga country can feed and maintain cattle until the next rain. Mulga does not need a lot of rainfall to grow, with each storm that comes through in otherwise drought conditions, the tree regenerates and becomes full of leaf again.

During droughts there is an increased need to harvest Mulga, especially as the leaf from the older tree is more palatable. Where the fodder is harvested will depend on where and how far they need to walk to waters and what condition the trees are in. The new rule allowing notification of 500ha areas per lot at a time does not allow for the flexibility required to move around to where the harvesting needs to take place.

Effects on Communities

My off farm job is a regional manager for a leading industry organisation and as such I am very aware of the devastation the current prolonged drought has caused not only landholders across the state but also regional communities. Most areas, especially north west Queensland are all but destocked, but not the Mulga lands. It is graziers on the Mulga lands that will be able to bounce back quicker post drought as they have been able to mostly keep about 60% of their herd going and do not have to start from 0 in a livestock market that will be very bullish. And the Mulga just keeps on growing, given the next good rains it will be thicker than ever.

So the Mulga lands, which is the breeding hub of southern Queensland, have been able to keep on producing and supply stock to saleyards, backgrounders, feedlots, processors which is keeping the industry turning over whilst we wait for other areas to get back on their feet. That's Jobs, jobs and more jobs. Jobs that are maintained by people in all facets of agriculture, while the rest of the state is in crisis. Take the ability to sustainably harvest mulga out of the equation and there is no doubt there will be a further collapse of regional towns of SW Queensland.

This Bill is about the protection of vegetation but on implementing it there is a need to consider the affect these changes will have on the everyday production of agriculture which forms the economic basis of our regional communities. A question relating to whether the impacts on agriculture had been considered was asked at the committee hearing 15 March but it was not answered and put aside. A very relevant question I feel.

The Renewable Resource

This country has been surviving since settlement from the use of the valuable drought resistant fodder of Mulga. The majority of graziers understand the importance of managing their properties with a view to overall balance ie. Grasses, regrowth and trees. Mulga keeps producing in drought and after the rains it responds quickly, grows thicker, so much so that grasses can't generate under the dense canopy. It needs to be thinned to allow for the sun to infiltrate and allow grasses to grow or be re-harvested. The quickest way to grow Mulga is to knock one over because 10 will replace it and very rapidly.

Changes to the Self Assessable Codes

The SAC's introduced in 2013 made applications for and on-ground implementation of harvesting, thinning etc much easier to understand and apply. The majority of landholders are following the codes and doing the right thing. They found the codes very useable and acceptable. There were still rules there but notification was made much easier with much quicker turn-around times, helpful for applications in severe drought and the documents contained very easy to read information and diagrams for any-one to understand.

Harvesting is usually done in drought times but for some, especially in lower rainfall areas, Mulga harvesting is part of the grazing system. The new notification requirements of allowing 500ha areas per lot is unworkable in general drought feeding systems. In drought, you need the flexibility to move harvesting operations to where the water is available, where the trees are in optimum condition etc. In many areas there will be 3 different ecosystems with in that 500ha, with some RE's not able to be touched so it decreases the available area. Graziers feeding stock do not have the time, nor need the added pressure of the consistent notifications that may be required. For what, harvesting a tree that will grow back 10 times faster and the regrowth it produces will be of more value to carbon sequestration than the 1 standing old tree that got knocked down. Carbon projects are keen to lock up regrowth Mulga trees, not the old trees, indicating that it is the growing tree that is of most value to the project for Carbon sequestration.

Jobs like thinning of regrowth and encroachment is often a job that is done when finances can allow it and on a bit by bit basis. The new regulations require thinning to be via a Property Development application which has been quoted of having a \$3000 applications fee and the need to prove you are taking the ecosystem back to natural state. It could be that you may need professional to assist in development of this plan and that will be a fee of \$10000. With thinning, under the previous SAC's requiring the use of a single dozer, the costs are not economical and work out to be about \$40/acre. All this added application cost does not measure up for those who just want to go out and thin out some regrowth to let sunlight in and create grasses to the dense trees don't choke each other out which is what many grazier's intentions are. That is another fact that isn't recognised, trees left to grown in dense colonies will choke each other out so thinning allows for the main trees to grow bigger and stronger, provided grass for cattle, corridors for furry animals, every-one is happy. A nice balance all-round. A true landscape approach.

The studies have all been done, that the present system of management is what is best for the country. Many stations are held by 4th and 5th generation families. They would not be still here if they were depleting the environment. CSIRO and NRM studies on Mulga lands have been done in the past and proven to work. I sat next to a retired CSIRO scientist who had spent many years in the Mulga lands testing and recording and the harvesting of timber, with trees, limbs, debris and mulch left on ground to catch the rain as it fell and allow it to penetrate the ground, instead of it swiftly running off the harder red soils, has been proven to be the best management for this country. It has been tested in field tests and the records will be held in files in offices in Charleville should someone bother to go and have a look.

Technology and Implementation


The average age of the Australian farmer is around 56. That means the average farmer was born before the introduction of technology like computers, gps, camera phones etc. Whilst we do have next generation farmers entering the industry and the older ones are trying to get a handle on using technology, as a rule the need to keep up to date with this constantly changing requirements and on ground implementation just to feed their hungry cattle quite daunting. And I don't need to get into the availability and un-reliability of internet services in the bush.

In the recent Vegetation Management Bill hearing questions were asked on department staffing ie. 'how will the delivery of services change if the bill is passed'. Response was that existing staff will undertake compliance activities, explain to landholders, working with landholders, all vegetation management officers do that as part of their role. Next question was that if the new legislation comes into effect will need for more information to be provided ie. will need on-ground visits, workshops etc. Response was that there are already significant resources ie Charleville hub. There was also a question about how the information has been distributed and feedback received for which the response was that people have been positive and it is going very well. I would like the committee to live a day in my shoes as the regional manager of a leading agricultural industry body in SW Queensland as I can tell you from the inundation of phone calls from very stressed graziers this is not the case and very many are confused and very stressed about this attack on their livelihood once again. If this bill comes to pass there will be a need for lots of on-ground service provisions to get people up to speed on changes and possibly available on 1 on 1 and small group basis. This implementation of yet again restrictive changes comes while landholders are fighting the worst of drought seasons, hanging on to keep their operations in-tact.

Carbon

Carbon Sequestration works hand in hand with vegetation management. A look into the Clean Energy Regulators website will show many projects have and are being established in SW Queensland, particularly in the Mulga regions. For many graziers it means locking up some eligible Category X country to regrow the trees and in return they receive dividends from carbon projects. I never hear the fact that this regeneration of trees under carbon projects which remain for 25 and 100 years are ever taken into consideration when vegetation management rules are made. It is possibly a fact that by regulations which don't allow a grazier to manage vegetation on their freehold land is actually creating carbon storage which the grazier gets no compensation for. The downside of carbon farming is that many properties have been purchased by absentee City investors who farm trees and don't have consideration for managing pest and weeds or maintenance to fences. The properties are left vacant. This situation, the loss of people and grazing enterprises from the districts, does not help the regional communities and decreasing agriculture sector will affect the communities creating loss of jobs, services, education, health professionals etc.

The point I make here is that if this constant changing of regulations does not stop and a balance is put up making fair laws for farmers trying to manage vegetation, then many more graziers will get fed up and sell out with their properties possibly snavelled up by absentee carbon investors which has been happening in the regions of the SW and that is not good for regional communities. We need to attract people to the regions, not disillusion them .

Signed:	
Address:	
Date:	21/03/18