

From:
To: [SDNRAIDC](#)
Subject: Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018
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SUBMISSION TO:

Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018

Leo Neill-Ballantine

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.

Vegetation Management Case Study

Leo Neill-Ballantine – ‘Galloway Plains’

22 March 2018

Property Details:

1. History of property and vegetation management –

- Ownership: Have owned property for 155 years. Great-Great Grandfather went to the effort of purchasing blocks to Freehold as finances permitted and through years descendants have been incorporated in large family trust.
- Size of property: Galloway Plains – 38,000 acres and Bocoolima 15,000 acres



• Use - intentions for use:

- The property is managed as one unit with families sharing equipment and labour.
- Brother Clay, runs one part of property as separate business.
- The major production system is beef cattle, selling stores and bullocks.
- Galloway turns off 1,100 - 1,200 store cattle per annum and about 200 cull cows and Bocoolima aims to turn off 800 bullocks of 2-3yrs.
- In the past, timber has been another income source, but due to weed infestations on neighbouring properties caused by timer harvesters, this has been discontinued on Galloway.
- It is intended that timber will be harvested in near future as Blue Gum pockets have been retained in particular pockets and will be thinned soon for farm-forestry benefits.
- In last decade have ploughed 200 acres and planted improved pasture with

Rhodes, Creeping Blue Grass, Buffel, Butterfly Pea, Siratro and Seca Stylo for baling hay – 1,600 in 2015 (Note: In 2009 bad drought resulted in spending \$180K on hay)

- 10,000 acres is highly suitable for developing with similar improved pasture (conservative estimate)
- Types of country: Blue Gum Flats with alluvial soils, with Poplar Box, Moreton Bay Ash on slopes and ridges along with Iron Bark on granite ridges. The property is not traditional coastal country with average stocking rates of 1 beast/9-12 acres. Under a rotational grazing system, these stocking rates can improve to 1 beast/4-5 acres.
- Clearing as percentage of whole property: Over the years the whole property has been ring-barked with a major operation through the 1940s-60s clearing all vegetation on property apart from scattered large trees and vegetation complexes along drainage lines and streams. In 2004-06 about 3,000-4,000 acres was cleared with chemical (500 acres Graslan and 2500 acres Tordon). Prior to clearing with Graslan, there was no grass on about 40% of this area, and there were considerable patches of bare ground on the Box tree area cleared with Tordon. Both areas are now suffering with regrowth, with the Tordon area being noticeably worse than the Graslan area. Some regrowth is 25cm diameter.
- How the clearing area relates to other vegetation/corridors on property and in region: Creek-lines have been left as corridors in the past and regrowth has reconnected much of the landscape.
- Knowledge/Capacity: Through the 1980s the DPI began an 18-year trial investigating different legumes, stocking-rates and clearing rates over 22 paddocks, which gave property specific information. Leo has played a long role as a beef industry leader and has been directly involved on committees with the Fitzroy Basin Association (FBA) and was a Councillor with the Gladstone Regional Council. With FBA, Leo has had considerable oversight of land-type fencing, riparian management projects and weed projects. Also Leo has been a member of the AgForce Council and Cattle board.

Responses regarding Amendments in the 2018 Bill:

Thickening of Vegetation

2. Understanding of historic vegetation communities on the property and the extent/density/cover%

- When purchased the property was all timbered with more open areas on Blue-Gum flats, but still with timber throughout.
- Thickening has occurred to different degrees on the property. Under historic and current management practices the Blue-Gum flat remain open and retain good ground cover with grass.
- In 1800s we employed a full-time timber cutter who ring-barked a lot of good flats. For example, near the airstrip there are big old stumps from that era.
- In Broad-leaved Ironbark and Box country thickening is a problem. The stocking capacity of this country falls away rapidly following rain and many paddocks now require Tordon (or Graslan).
- “We had an interesting learning recently. Cleaned out a dam and Blue-Gum seeds buried under 3m of mud for close to 100 years, germinated prolifically when they

were brought to the surface.”

3. The amount to which vegetation has changed in extent or thickened as a response to recent agricultural management (as opposed to indigenous management)

- Tordon, Ringbarking and Graslan have been the three major treatments, although fire has regularly been used to control suckers.
- Trees want to be there – Our big challenge is to manage the changing balance between trees and grass on a cyclic rotational basis.
- Every 30-40 years, we need to invest in vegetation management to restore the balance in favour of grass production.

4. The impact that vegetation changes have on property management:

- Production: With 30-40-year cycle, production becomes impacted gradually through this time. “In 2009 when we had 11 months without rain, the cattle fell away quickly due to poorer grass reserves.”
- Financial: “With the family partnership, we are currently undergoing restructure which reduces possibility of committing significant capital to vegetation management for some time. We need to sort this new structure out before spending on Tordon work. Therefore, from a business planning sense we need certainty in the regulations so we can incorporate longer-term vegetation management into the cash flow of the family business.”
- Environmental: The thickening in some parts of property results in much greater soil exposure and erosion, therefore we try to manage the tree-grass balance and keep grass cover to a maximum.
- Social/labour: “We have cyclic labour needs now with vegetation management, and in future we would prefer to have a rotational vegetation management program so different paddocks are at differing stages of regrowth and the capital and labour requirements can be spread out rather than bunched at one time. For this though, we need certainty in longer term regulations.”

5. Issues and intentions in management of vegetation in the near, medium and long-term future:

- In the long term we aim to manage the whole property as a rotational grazing enterprise
- That way we can remove \$60K in helicopter costs and be able to manage the herd to target markets more effectively
- Part of this will be splitting big paddocks into about 8 cells, incorporating vegetation management also on a rotational basis
- Pasture improvement and vegetation management in particular paddocks can be completed, then these paddocks spelled in the rotation to suit establishment
- The principle aim is more ground cover, better pasture production, better infiltration and better quality water run-off: A win-win for all!!
- Part of the challenge will be to incorporate different land types into different paddocks and balance the rotation to suit

6. Your suggestions on policy/regulatory instruments required to assist in management of vegetation thickening

- Need a regulatory framework that provides certainty for the long-term

High Value Agriculture/Irrigated High Value Agriculture (HVA/IHVA)

7. Application activities – (identify details of why you have not gone ahead with HVA/IHVA?)

- Intentions with IHVA:
 - We need IHVA to be available and would definitely make an application in the next few years. These plans originated from meetings with Minister Jeff Seeney and others
 - Want to drought proof the property
- Perceived benefits to property management:
 - Production: Intend to retain current cattle numbers but improve quality and timing of turnoff. The centre-pivot improved pasture will also allow the implementation of multiple production systems, including organic pigs, chickens, with the cattle. As a minimum it should be possible to have at least 2 cuts per season.
 - Financial: Aim is to increase profitability, with surplus focused on improvement of further property resources.
 - Environmental: Using centre-pivot will improve ability to rest country
 - Social/labour: It would be expected that 2-3 full-time jobs + 2 casual jobs will be required to make project work.
- Size of area to be developed: 500 acres initially with longer term options of being able to develop up to 10,000 acres.
- Soil type(s) and suitability for agriculture: Blue Gum Flats with alluvial soils are highly suited to development.
- Water source: reliability, quantity and quality: Plans are to build a big dam and access underground water (a water diviner has shown irrigation water is available)
- Equipment investment: The outlay will require assured return with \$800K - \$1M the expected development investment.
- People contacted:
- Obstacles (foreseen):
- Time and cost for application: Expect to seek application for project rollout over next 5 – 10 years

8. Status of application at present

- Not applied – but require HVA/IHVA to be a firm provision for longer term planning

9. Issues to longer term property management and investment if HVA/IHVA does not go ahead

- Shelve development plans and this is a big issue with longer term profitability and business

10. Previous experience with developing country and evidence of effective outcomes
Been on property for four generations and have been successful

- See Knowledge/Capacity above on page 1

11. Intended farm management practices on cleared area, e.g. manage fertiliser usage,

irrigation practice, water run-off, contour farming, erosion and sediment run off, water logging, salinization risk: Based on research conducted on Galloway Plains by DAFF, best-management-practices will be implemented.

Category C – High Value Regrowth

12. Opinion about ‘high value regrowth’ and the role it should play in property management:

- “It is hard to comprehend how Category C High Value Regrowth can be determined from a desktop study. Some of the Category C land shown is over some of our most productive country. The Government will limit production if regulations are placed over this land!”

13. Ideas about compensation and property rights regarding Category C

Category R – Vegetation within 50 metres of a watercourse in Great Barrier Reef Catchments

14. Experience with the use of buffers to improve runoff water quality and protect stream health and habitat:

- “Mixed opinion about this. Riparian fencing and management of these areas as separate paddocks works well for protecting creekbanks and stability. On other country however, clearing right to creekbank has been fine. It is crazy to have a blanket ruling that 50 metres needs to be left to protect stream health and water quality.”

15. The best ways to improve runoff water quality and protect stream health and habitat:

- “Fit-for-purpose - It all gets down to soil type.”

No compensation payable to HVA, IHVA and PMAV applicants during transitional arrangements and amendments will be retrospectively enforced

16. Opinion regarding compensation and vegetation management

- “The Government has been taking away rights for decades. Many people have become unviable. There is a loss of jobs and mental health is an increasing issue. What about the old fellows who have been poking along doing their best and keeping their noses clean, but when they try to develop small areas of their property they get knocked back. For many, this is the final straw!!”
- “If Queensland really wants to be serious about responding to the Free Trade Agreements and increased demand for protein, or improving our competitiveness for Asia we need to allow innovation in agricultural production systems – Otherwise we will get slammed!! Look at Brazil!!”
- “Most producers get caught up in day-to-day management and do not see the importance of these amendments, until it is too late. We need to move away from this negativity and shift focus to productivity and competitiveness on the world stage!!”

Extra Information on Protected Plants Trigger Maps

17. Blue Dots – Trigger Map:

- “There are a few questions about the Protected Plants regulations. On one part of the property a blue dot seems to indicate Brigalow, which was actually introduced by bringing cattle and machinery from Brigalow country, rather than it being endemic to the area!! Also, while it is fine to look after and protect semi-evergreen vine thicket in small areas, it is ridiculous to rule out vegetation management over the WHOLE CIRCLE – 2 km radius!!
- The mentality needs to change, as we can incorporate protected areas in normal property management.”

Key Messages

- Regulations for Vegetation Management need to be long-term for development in a sustainable manner
- Producers need to develop, to take advantage of the increasing market incentives
- Retain provisions like High Value Agriculture and Irrigated High Value Agriculture

Kind Regards

Leo Neill-Ballantine
Manager
Galloway Plains