

SUBMISSION

The St George and District Chamber of Commerce is an organisation that represents small business primarily within the Shire of Balonne. The chamber have serious concerns with changes to the vegetation management act that will impact our farming community and subsequently impact the viability of small business in the region.

As a precursor to this submission, let it be clear that what may appear at times to be from a farmer's perspective, not a small business one, is because of the following:

- Farmers are small businesses.
- Small business and the families that own, them, and work in them are directly affected by any impost on a farmer's livelihood, as are the viability of schools, government services, health services etc.
- The profitability of large corporate businesses and the significant number they employ, are also directly affected by the viability of our farmers, and because increasingly they are also buying in to farms in our regions.
- In fact, you in the city are affected by the viability of our farmers, through increased costs, reduction in food quality, increased shortages and variety, increases in taxes to cover subsidies and welfare.

Any reduction in a farmer's ability to be profitable and productive will affect the whole community, both rural and urban. It may take a while to wash through, but as soon as we start to import inferior, less safe produce from overseas, then every consumer will be paying in more ways than one for the imposts that are being put on Queensland farmers, so don't think that supporting this is a measure that will clear your conscience, without undue personal cost, you will pay sometime down the line.

Farmers make up barely 5% of the population and yet they perform an essential service that the other 95% don't want to do, and need someone else to do, an essential service that is... essential, we can't do without it, yet all government want to do is restrict their ability to produce, for political gain and without what appears to be any scientific or constructive evidence.

Impede small communities by limiting farmers resources and you will see an increased reliance on aid and funding, more migration to urban environments, higher unemployment, and ultimately bigger and uglier deficits. It appears that unlike farmers, government does not look to the future as they proclaim but look to the next election wearing deceitful mask of environmental concern, a task that is made easy by an increasing number of insulated and ill-informed urban voters who only hear and see what they are told, by equally ill-informed and self-interested media. We all belong to tribes, cultivated by leaders who need differences to survive, these tribes are identified by those in the real world, and those in the idealistic one. Unfortunately, idealism only produces one thing, and that is many more challenges to progress.

Farmers have already got many natural challenges, and the communities and businesses that support them are all affected by them, droughts, floods, distance, heat cold and decreasing

populations, yet our governments are hell bent on giving them as many more as they can find the imagination to create.

There is no doubt that these changes to vegetation management are one of these and are purely for political advantage, advantage that is proliferated by ignorance and misinformation. As just stated, the farming community are a minority without the numbers to attract the self-interest on which politics thrives, they can only appeal to the notion of fair play and old-fashioned honesty to support their case.

Empathy is not a word that appears to have any relevance in today's politics, it is simply about tomorrow's headline. This feedback process, as futile as we know it is, is just another symptom of the apathy in today's leadership. It is; get elected, stay elected, get your retirement perks, get your laurels for a "stellar" career, and then piss off. No recriminations, no blame no repercussions and no care, just problems for the next generation.

The business community wants to see the retraction of destructive legislation that is purely political horse-trading wrapped in a guise of environmental concern. Farmers and their respective communities, and ultimately the larger economy that gain indirect benefit from farming, have had enough of the political points scoring that is being wagered at their expense.

We as a society are not perfect, our leaders are highly representative of that, and so our business community are also not perfect, but where else in our business community are such restrictive measures used to hold a minority to account at the cost of productivity that affects all levels of the community. This is a primary industry, primary meaning it is the roots that feeds the expansive economy above it, take away the ability of the roots to expand and prosper and the economy that relies on it, will ultimately wither and die.

Listen to the farmers, they have the knowledge from generations of experience, yes, they have made their mistakes, but learn from them they have and we now have a world renowned agricultural sector, that has a healthy sustainable image, and is envied by many.

To highlight what has been stated in the beforementioned paragraphs, we would like to quote recent government statistics from a project that was completed at Longreach:

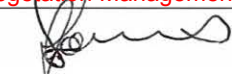

The project in cooperation with all landholders was that 2500kms of fence was installed to allow the safety and growth of the sheep flock from the scourge of wild dogs.

This project increased the growth of the herd by 200,000 sheep, employing 130 more people, but most notably it increased the overall population by 500 people, 500 people that now have access to jobs and an alternate lifestyle, less reliance on welfare and higher self-esteem, and increased the viability of the local businesses through ongoing productivity.

This is the impact that small changes can have on a community and a region, these changes will be replicated in a completely opposite and negative direction and with an amplified impact, when the draconian clearing laws are imposed on an already fragile industry.

Rethink your reasons and be honest with yourselves, these laws are not for the purpose that is marketed, they may achieve political gain, but at a greater cost to the economy, the future of our rural regions and an even more devastating cost to the mental health of our over-stressed farming sector.

It is ironic and sad that the first words our politicians want to say to us when we meet is, "we want to support small business, how can we help" so our reply is "be honest and say what you really mean", because we don't believe you.

Signed:	
Address:	
Date:	22 / 03 / 18.