

22/03/18

To Whom It May Concern,

I write to you regarding the changes to the Vegetation Management Laws.

To give some context, I am a University student studying Physiotherapy. This may seem irrelevant to the subject but I was raised on a beef property in the Fitzroy area since the age of 4. I have chosen to leave the agriculture industry because I cannot see a viable future for myself based purely in the industry. With all the pressure put on farming families at the moment, and with continual policy changes like this on being proposed, I cannot see myself being able support myself or a future family without an off-farm income. It may just be me, but it just seems wrong that someone who has grown up living and loving an industry and a career CANNOT live to be part of it because of a lack of economical and legislative support. The way I see it, 'blue-collar' industries such as agriculture, mining and trades, are missing out on much needed support – simply look at the near 200 miners losing jobs just 2 weeks ago because a company could replace their jobs with automated vehicles. Where was the protection for those jobs?

I apologise for digressing from the subject, but it's all relevant. If this is what the situation is for myself and for a lot of the young people I know, imagine what the future of agriculture looks like 20 years or so down the track. Industries need new input and information, and crushing the newcomers to the industry will eventualise what the government seems to already think of the agriculture industry – a bunch of old fossils determined to destroy the country by not adapting processes and innovations. New blood is what drives change and adaption, and sorry to say, but the new blood is high-tailing it to other industries because we can't support ourselves in our current one.

The topic is the changes proposed on the 8<sup>th</sup> March 2018 aiming to restrict, even further, the land clearing for agricultural purposes, which is especially pertinent to mulga scrub country. The Mulga plant, *acacia aneura*, is a native plant in the south-west area of Queensland that is used for animal fodder due to the barren nature of the country. As shown recently by billboards in the area, Mulga is a declared weed, albeit a useful one. Weeds have the ability to spread incredibly fast through methods that include encouraging a monoculture. Monoculture is a dirty word. It means that where there is mulga, there are no other species of plant. The further spread of mulga vegetation leads to encroachment on territories where other species are abundant, and the diversity of pastures is one of the most important factors in preventing erosion and other ecological disasters. Where there are many large and small plants, there are huge root systems holding topsoil together, and the fall of rain is absorbed by a layer of vegetation. In mulga country the roots are far less spread out, and with this lack of support the soil is easily washed away, out to river systems and on to the Great Barrier Reef and other vulnerable systems. This demonstrates that the clearing of mulga to preserve pasture should in fact be encouraged, not restricted and limited.

As Mulga establishes a monoculture, as previously mentioned, it is also the only available food source for a lot of stock. Animals often eat the leaves of scrub plants, although opposed to the giraffes in Africa, cattle have a limited reach, and many plants grow higher than they can reach. To avoid injuries to animals attempting to reach this food, many farmers flatten the plants,

which in addition to letting cattle feed also encourages new growth, in the same vein as burning and storms naturally clearing ground to create new opportunities for younger plants to grow through.

On to my second issue – the PMAV changes. My property was lucky enough to be run under the influence of my mother, who pushed and pushed despite government restrictions to have our entire holdings changed to a category where we can still run the property effectively. Most properties, however, don't have the time or energy or tenacity to get these changes made, and as a result of the new proposal, will struggle now to gain the freedom to manage the land the best way for their farming. It's all very well to say that farmers will still be able to make changes and seek approval, but one farmer estimates the cost of getting a permit will be at least \$3,000; legal companies estimate up to \$10,000 if the application is not improved and the applicant has to seek legal aid. With our state still in drought in many areas, and with many farmers earning below minimum wage when the hours worked are taken into account, how does anyone have the money to spare? It's often a misconception of the government that people can go to local offices to make claims, seek support and ask for changes or special considerations, but the reality is that many people affected by these laws simply aren't in a position where they can take valuable time off work to make a trip to a town often several hours away, only to sit in an office for several hours and have nothing achieved by the end of the day. This isn't the fault of government offices, it is hard to coordinate when there is so much bureaucratic red tape to climb through, but the result is that it's easier to give up from the start. This is the burden of the underdogs, they are kept under by a system that doesn't work to support everybody.

My third issue moves away from mulga specific areas and on to Queensland in general. When the statistics quoted by the government about land cleared in previous years are published, they are not taking into account what has been done with the cleared land. It is portrayed as if an area 'twice the size of Brisbane or seven times the size of Rockhampton' has been decimated, with no regard to the regrowth and pastoral improvements made. The case is, in fact, that cleared lands are cleared because they are needed for pastoral improvement. Also, as a side, the amount of land cleared equates to only 0.24% of Queensland. I wonder how much land is cleared for the expansion of suburban areas?

The government websites say that these laws will not affect those farmers who are doing the right thing already, the vast majority. Aside from the fact that this is a blatant lie, why must so much taxpayer money be invested into a minor problem perpetrated by a small proportion of the industry? Appeasing other minority parties to the detriment of Queensland residents is not, in my opinion, a way to run a government. You can't build a house while pulling bricks out of the foundation.

The agricultural industry is already facing opposition from multiple directions: dairy farmers are struggling to make money with the monopoly of large supermarkets, there is only one family owned dairy in the Mackay industry as of last week; farmers with land near water sources are being pressured to reduce run off to protect the Great Barrier Reef without support to do so, with the government being apparently unaware of the fact that plants and animals need access to water to survive; the livestock exportation a few years ago caused many people to lose family properties, not to mention the thousands of animals that starved to death in the brutal sun of the Northern Territory and North Queensland as a result of the overnight legislation change. Agriculture seems to be the whipping boy that is targeted every time a

Government party wants to appear as though they are supporting the environment, but as evidenced from history, agriculture is the backbone of Society. The mark of a successful civilisation was the ability to harvest, farm and domesticate animals, that has been the case since *homo sapien* first developed these techniques. Why put down the people who put 3 meals a day on the table for all Australians?

Yours incredibly sincerely,

Laura Rutherford

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