

Submission

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

Our family runs a viable, productive cattle enterprise supporting two families. It is our love for the land and good management practices such as selective clearing and thinning of vegetation that have aided in developing an ecosystem that is diverse and strong consisting of animals, birds, insects, grasses, shrubs and trees.

Of great concern is the amendments to the self assessable vegetation clearing code, relating to managing thickened vegetation. The new accepted development code, Managing thickened vegetation only allows non-coastal lots greater than 100 Ha- 10% of the total area of the category B areas of the lot or 400 Ha, whichever is the lesser. This is just not fair for landholders who have large areas on one single lot and plan. Our property is 5820 Ha on Lot 23 RN 527, to allow us to be only able to thin 400 Ha is not going to allow us to control the thickening of vegetation over the whole of our property. Increasing the area available for thinning from 10% to 20% of the land tenure, with no size restrictions would be a better result for farmers.

Our property consists of primarily of category B vegetation, of which 80% is of a VMA Status of Least Concern. The land is generally classified as a Sparse regional ecosystem, as a result we can only manage vegetation when the trees exceed 750 trees per hectare and then we can only thin down to 300 trees per hectare. Thinning down to 300 trees is just too many and would not be viable, thinning down to 100 trees per hectare would be more viable. Previous thinning areas at 70-100 trees per hectare have provided a great balance of grass and trees. At 70-100 trees per hectare there is a balance between production and a sustainable ecosystem. Being able to get the most out of your land asset is what drives a lot of farmers, by disallowing the ability of landholders to control thickened vegetation properly will result in massive production and financial losses. These losses are then felt through the whole community.

Since European settlement the environmental conditions of native forests and woodlands have changed with the introduction of stock grazing and fire regimes. In some cases, this has resulted in thickening of areas to a level beyond the density expected for the regional ecosystem. Massive thickening can have adverse effects on the regional ecosystem, it's functioning and biodiversity. Thinning and appropriate follow up management can return these thickened areas to a state that is more typical for the regional ecosystem.

Prior to the new Accepted Development Code for managing thickened vegetation we had used a self assessable clearing code. We found the old code very easy to use and there was a real sustainable balance between production and environmental values. In areas that were thinned there was a noticeable increase in grass growth with no erosion, landscape stability was maintained. The thinning allowed the growth of grass but also allowed the remaining trees to be able to grow into stronger larger trees than what they would have been in a thickened habitat.

Removing of The self assessable codes for thickened vegetation and the changing of the managed tree densities will greatly effect our business. The carrying capacity of our property will be decreased, thickened vegetation will make mustering and managing our cattle hard, increasing costs. The flow on effect would be devastating for our business.

The constant change in legislation and the severity of the change greatly impacts on the ability of farm managers to plan and implement effective long-term property and business management decisions. Let us run our businesses the way we need to, to remain viable productive and efficient, while creating a sustainable environment to pass on to the next generation.

Signed: Luke Ferguson

Date: 22/3/2018