

Reason for confidentiality:

## SUBMISSION

As a multi generational family farming business in the South Burnett and Darling Downs regions of Queensland, we provide our submission opposing 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 and families like ours 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. We are totally opposed to this continued uncertainty and attacks on the viability of ourselves, our family, the long-term sustainability of our business as well as attacks on fellow farmers across Queensland.

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.

### 1. Removing High Value Agriculture and Irrigated High Value Agriculture from the Vegetation Management Framework

The removal of High Value Agriculture (HVA) and irrigated HVA (IHVA) affects farmers in regions across Queensland differently, with those in the north particularly hard hit.

Throughout northern Queensland energy and protein become limiting in cattle diets during the dry season and this can cause farmers issues with stock survival and welfare through years of drought. HVA and IHVA permits provide farmers in northern Queensland with the opportunity to grow fodder and grain for supplementing in the dry season and finishing off stock for market.

It also provides opportunity for high value grain and horticulture crops to be grown, which in turn provide regional and rural jobs, particularly in indigenous communities, sustaining families and communities and supporting their long term resilience, breaking a cycle of dependence.

In central and southern Queensland, HVA and IHVA provides opportunity for farmers to drought-proof properties and stabilise production and income over variable climatic and market conditions. Sustainable clearing for relatively small pockets of high value agriculture enable agricultural production to improve continuity of supply to food processors and meet the increasing requirements of international markets and Australia's Free Trade Agreements.

Indigenous development is particularly compromised by the re-inclusion of High Value Regrowth (HVR) as well as the stripping of the right to develop traditional lands as HVA or IHVA. For example, Indigenous landowners on the

Gilbert River in northern Queensland preparing to submit IHVA applications have now been denied the possibility of stabilising beef production and employing community labour on their properties.

## 2. Retaining Self-Assessable Codes

Under the current science based self assessable codes, the Queensland government is at all times informed of work being undertaken, promoting a more open and encouraging relationship with Queensland's primary producers.

Science based self-assessable codes currently help farmers carry out the routine vegetation management practices necessary to sustainably produce food and fibre, providing responsible land stewardship, contributing to the rural and regional economy and providing jobs throughout the supply chain (transport workers, meat workers, storemen, packers and shop assistants).

No-one observes their land more than the farmers who run it – no-one sees in as much detail, the needs and responses of the land to management activities. No-one is better placed to assess what needs to be done, so that future generations can live and work on a sustainable, healthy and productive farm.

Responsible land managers care for the land on behalf of the whole community – providing natural resource management stewardship for all.

The currently used self-assessable codes help farmers to ensure trees and grass stay in balance, avoid soil erosion and feed animals in drought. Farmers are not required to obtain permits for work done under the self-assessable codes, but are required to notify the Queensland Government.

## 3. Including High Value Regrowth as an additional layer of regulation under the Vegetation Management Framework on leasehold, freehold and indigenous land

High Value Regrowth - The expansion of High Value Regrowth (HVR) regulation on leasehold, freehold and indigenous land is an overt grab by the Queensland Government in search of targets for meeting international treaties such as the Kyoto Protocol and more recently the 2015 Paris Climate Deal. In 2009 when initially introduced, this HVR layer was prepared hastily in a 'desk-top' mapping exercise with associated errors including areas of non-native vegetation (such as orchards) and bare earth. In preliminary investigations of several properties it appears that the accuracy of the 2018 HVR is more flawed than 2009 and 2016.

As graziers, we manage vegetation and selectively thin the trees on our land to grow pastures for our cattle to graze. Vegetation in more rugged country, less inclined to strong grass growth, is left to provide shelter and wildlife corridors. We work with fragile soils to ensure their long term sustainability. We strive to achieve that delicate balance between healthy grazing and natural ecosystems on our properties. We do this by adopting sound ecological approaches to grazing land management where optimum productivity and healthy landscapes are ensured.

We have been doing this across our properties for three generations - with the fourth generation now joining our business – in a completely sustainable manner. As beef producers, we need to meet growing demand from consumers both here in Australia and overseas in order to remain productive and create sustainable jobs in agriculture. In order to achieve this, we must be allowed to sustainably manage regrowth vegetation on our land.

Despite media reports to the contrary there has been an overall Australian reduction in land clearing. The following table (ABC News, 2018) shows that overall Australia has actually recorded an annual net gain in forest

area for the 2010-2015 period of 0.2 per cent per year. This means that more forest area was established over this time period than was actually lost.

Vegetation was cleared on just 0.23 per cent of Queensland's land area in 2015/16, or less than one quarter of one per cent. And that doesn't factor in how much vegetation grew during the same period (Department of Science, Information Technology & Innovation, 2017). Despite alarmist analogies about the number of football fields cleared, the Statewide Landcover and Trees Study puts the figure into context, revealing that just 0.23 per cent of Queensland's land area was cleared in 2015/16 (Department of Science, Information Technology & Innovation, 2017).

Two thirds of the clearing occurring in Queensland is to manage areas that have previously been cleared and for routine vegetation management practices. On our property we use regrowth clearing to aid in construction of fences, firebreaks, property maintenance, pasture growth and access tracks.

Preventing the clearing of regrowth that is more than 15 years old will impact on regrowth plans on many properties, causing the loss of valuable grazing lands, and negatively impacting on livelihoods in both our Regional Communities and further down the supply chain in urban areas.

The following tables published in the UN's [Global Forest Resources Assessment 2015](#) provide worldwide comparisons of forest changes.

#### Top ten countries reporting the greatest annual net loss in forest area, 2010-2015

Country	Area (hectares)	Rate
Brazil	984,000	0.2 per cent
Indonesia	684,000	0.7 per cent
Myanmar	546,000	1.8 per cent
Nigeria	410,000	5 per cent
United Republic of Tanzania	372,000	0.8 per cent
Paraguay	325,000	2 per cent
Zimbabwe	312,000	2.1 per cent
Democratic Republic of the Congo	311,000	0.2 per cent
Argentina	297,000	1.1 per cent
Bolivia	289,000	0.5 per cent

#### Top ten countries reporting the greatest annual net gain in forest area, 2010-2015

Country	Area (hectares)	Rate
China	1,542,000	0.8 per cent
Australia	308,000	0.2 per cent
Chile	301,000	1.8 per cent
USA	275,000	0.1 per cent
Philippines	240,000	3.3 per cent
Gabon	200,000	0.9 per cent
Laos	189,000	1 per cent
India	178,000	0.3 per cent
Vietnam	129,000	0.9 per cent
France	113,000	0.7 per cent

**Source: Global Forest Resources Assessment, 2015; Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations**

“Surface cover is the key to erosion control in grazing lands. It prevents erosion by maintaining the soil in a condition that absorbs rainfall. Any runoff that does result will be impeded by the cover and is less likely to concentrate into an erosive force.

Trees play a vital role in grazing landscapes by providing shade, shelter and recycling nutrients by using moisture that may ‘leak’ into groundwater and contribute to salinity problems. They also provide stability to stream banks

and prevent landslip on susceptible steep slopes, however, trees provide little protection from erosion caused by raindrop impact and overland flow. In the control of erosion, surface cover is essential and bare areas beneath trees are vulnerable." *Ref Queensland Government Science Notes Land Series 91 - Erosion control in grazing lands*

4. Increasing Category R regrowth watercourse vegetation to include additional catchments in the Burnett Marv. Eastern Cape York and Fitzroy Great Barrier Reef Catchments.

In addition to the high value regrowth layer of vegetation types being added back onto no-go areas, landholders will also be seriously impacted by overnight changes to the regrowth watercourse mapping and the extent of essential habitat mapping.

Cities are increasingly spreading across arable land, along river systems and their nearby rich alluvial soils, taking over previously farmed areas. As a result, more areas need to be cultivated (and generally cleared more heavily) to replace this lost agricultural food-producing land, in order to feed an ever-increasing number of mouths.

There is currently a strong focus on developing Northern Australia, with great opportunities to utilise fertile soils for the production of food. The Queensland State Government Vegetation Management Framework will prevent farmers in these regions from developing agriculture projects, and greatly hinder the sustainable growth hoped for in this region.

We manage riparian zones across our grazing properties, ensuring grass cover is maintained to prevent erosion during heavy rain events. Having incurred substantial flood events in recent years, we have first hand experience of the importance of grass cover in sustaining creek and river banks to prevent dramatic erosion.

During the 2011 and 2013 flood events, we saw heavily treed creek banks wash away from beneath the tree roots, leaving gaping holes for further wash to occur. Where we had grassed banks, far less erosion occurred, enabling the creek to hold its previous soil and maintain the bank structure effectively.

5. That no compensation will be payable to landholders subject to added layers of regulation – high value regrowth, regrowth watercourses and essential habitat during transitional arrangements

The Queensland Government is proposing to remove vast areas of manageable land from farming enterprises, without addressing any kind of compensation for the unavoidable affects this act will have on grassland area, income lost and hugely reduced land values, let alone family succession planning, mental health and community resilience.

We believe that any legislative changes made that will impact the bottom line of businesses currently working in food and fibre primary industries right throughout Queensland must be compensated once implemented. The changes will affect all aspects of businesses impacted and this in turn will have a detrimental impact on land values, resulting in potential reviews from banks due to an altered loan value ratio.

Farming families plan for generations – it is not a business bought and sold quickly, and decade long thinking and planning is commonplace. These changes will undo much of the investment the Queensland Government has made in productivity loans, supporting new entrants and assisting diversification.

Just as the Queensland Government instituted a reform package for the taxi industry when it introduced legislation legalising alternate ride sharing enterprises, farming businesses should be compensated for the direct, negative and serious impact on their businesses.

6. Increasing compliance measures and penalties under vegetation management laws.

We believe the proposed Bill potentially breaches fundamental legislative principles (FLPs) as outlined in section 4 of the Legislative Standards Act 1992. Legislation should have sufficient regard to the rights and liberties of individuals and consequently should not adversely affect rights and liberties, or impose obligations, retrospectively.

In addition, penalties have effectively been tripled, indicating the Government does not think farmers who mistakenly clear vegetation are being penalised enough.

How ironic that when selecting land in years past, our forebears were punished by governments of the day for NOT clearing enough land, while our generations (and future ones) will be punished for trying to maintain those very areas, to try to continue to grow food and fibre for an ever-expanding population.

In an age when collaboration, co design and democracy are the critical decision tools for leadership, these proposed laws oppose these very principals. Primary producers – the producers of food and fibre – are willing to collaborate and co design effective legislation that enables multi generational thinking and planning, that achieves a solution where all have had a seat at the table.

7. Other matters relevant to the Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018 that the review committee should consider appropriate and worth some consideration

Is it not time that the government worked WITH primary producers instead of AGAINST us?

This endless pressure and threat of penalties will ensure that Queensland loses many good farmers with a wealth of knowledge and expertise, along with those from the next generation who can see how quickly their government moves to penalise them, rather than seeking ways to reward them for their efforts to lift sustainability with production.

Farmers are team players – they are used to adapting and flexing, working with others to find a solution and way forward - having legislation forced upon them that threatens their livelihood is not a positive, 2018 version of leadership – it is draconian, hierarchal and extremely negative.

Living in the Burnett Mary Region, our land management practise is focused on multi generational long term beef production. Without healthy soils, extensive and healthy ground cover and minimal erosion, we would not have a business. Our family are now ushering in the 4th generation to our business – young people who learn to manage their land from birth, people who care for the long term health and biodiversity, who celebrate the wildlife and ecology as much as cattle production. People who understand the rhythm of droughts, floods, frosts and scorching winds, and their relevant impact on the land.

Our family manages our land for the benefit of all Queenslanders and Australians. We are not environmental vandals as this legislation suggests - guilty until we prove our innocence.

We care for the land, we sell beef, and we pay taxes, so people in other parts of our state have public services provided by our economic productivity - hospitals, schools and highways.

Please visit the Burnett Mary region and consider our situation - we foster diversity, we live with tree management, and we have intensive grazing side by side with native vegetation.


We invest in ourselves and our business – we are willing to sit with legislators to find a shared vision, an outcome that can only sustain our state through jobs, a strong economy, food with outstanding provenance and fibre to clothe the world.

We are willing to share how we manage our fragile eco systems, how we plan for decades around our investment in biodiversity, soil health, carbon sequestration and more.

**Please do not make your decision as a committee without making visits to understand not only our love for our land, but an understanding of the work we invest every day to sustain Queensland's magnificent natural resource -it's grassland.**

**Without our management, this land would revert to a degraded state, with high levels of erosion and run off.**

**Humans are a critical element in sustainable land management to ensure we manage our fragile native pastures and trees – our land will not manage itself.**

Signed:	
Address:	
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