

SUBMISSION

In providing this submission I refer directly to the key provisions of the legislation which may be amended.

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

This change will take away the ability of land holders to clear small areas of land to develop farms. The removal of High Value Agriculture (HVA) and irrigated HVA (IHVA) affects all farmers in regions 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 have provided farmers in northern Queensland with the opportunity to grow fodder and grain for supplementing in the dry season and finishing off stock for market.

This removal of High Value Agriculture (HVA) and irrigated HVA will affect our business and future business with regards to plans made for future development and expansion that have now been completely removed. This will have a major impact on our business survivability into the future with regards to family and succession planning implications, possibly making it unviable to continue due to the risk of heavily reduced income from continued regrowth minimising our cattle carrying capacity considerably.

It will also reduce and limit the capability to drought proof our business for the future and future generations. This will definitely have a reduced effect on food and fibre production for a growing nation, and a growing world population.

2. Retaining Self-Assessable Codes

The amendment Bill seeks to deliver on the Government's 2017 election commitments to protect remnant and high conservation value non-remnant vegetation; amend the accepted development vegetation clearing codes to ensure they are providing appropriate protections based on Queensland Herbarium advice; and align the definition of high value regrowth vegetation with the international definition of High Conservation Value.

Science-based self-assessable codes help farmers carry out the routine vegetation management practices necessary to sustainably produce food and fibre.

The self-assessable codes help farmers 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 they are required to notify the Queensland Government.

Self-Assessable codes have reduced the cost and time taken to make applications for managing vegetation on our property, we have used a self-assessable code on our property to complete blade-ploughing to enrich the soil to grow much more fodder for cattle, subsequently increasing our cattle carrying capacity.

If the Self-assessable codes were taken away and we were required to undertake a development assessment and approval to do the same activity, this would limit our ability to effectively manage our property, therefore impacting our business from progressing and growing providing a sustainable future for us and our children.

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

The re-inclusion of High Value Regrowth (HVR) as an additional layer of regulation on leasehold, freehold and indigenous land is an overt grab by Queensland Government in search of targets for meeting international treaties such as the Paris Protocol. 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.

We have knowledge of our “Proposed Regulated Vegetation Management Maps” however these appear to change regularly without any formal notification and often multiple errors within.

These regulations are a very unwelcomed added stress to running our business that will essentially come at a large cost to production levels and limit us to expand our business. Certain parcels of land haven't been cleared yet due to the large cost involved to do this, however budgets and plans have been put in place to continue with this in the future which will also enhance land value to our property.

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

In addition to the high value regrowth layer being added back onto freehold and indigenous land, landholders will also be impacted by overnight changes to the regrowth watercourse mapping and the extent of essential habitat mapping. There is currently a strong focus on developing Northern Australia. The Queensland State Government Vegetation Management Framework is preventing these farmers from developing agriculture projects.

There are high levels of frustration surrounding the area of land that the Government has regulated overnight, with no warning. It takes a considerable amount of time, effort and research to determine what implications have been imposed to our property and if they are going to remain the same or if they will be changed again.

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

Again, the issue of compensation arises with the addition of these layers where is the recompense for Queensland farmers and what is the estimated dollar value of these layers?

All producers have purchased their land on a per hectare/acre basis, regardless of it's state or condition. Therefore, if certain areas of our land become unproductive due to these regulations, will we as producers be compensated with regards to the dollar value of High Value regrowth, regrowth watercourses or essential habitat considering that we had to originally pay for all of it?

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

The 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 there is a sense the Government does not think farmers who mistakenly clear vegetation are being penalised enough.

We give very careful consideration and practise very proactive measures with regards to managing vegetation under the Vegetation Management Act, we would like to continue to do this in a positive way that is kind to our business and the environment as we always have done.

These new proposed laws and amendments will change all of this and unfairly take away our managerial role away from within our businesses leaving us being micro managed by the Government and these laws.

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

There are numerous effects that these amendments will have on our business, family, community, region, Queensland and Australia. We as producers operate and care about the land more than most could possibly ever appreciate, we are continually maintaining, developing and trying to be sustainable well into the future under all varying circumstances and at the mercy of mother nature.

We could all work harmoniously if all farmers and producers are given the opportunity and assistance to develop sustainably if given the appropriate frameworks and encouragement. We as producers quite often feel isolated and neglected by the Australian Government with major focus and importance being portrayed and placed in other areas.

To successfully continue within this industry with confidence we need legislation set in place that we can make future plans for knowing that it isn't going to continually be changed or modified. We would like the opportunity to drought proof our business for a long and sustainable future.

It is very difficult to ascertain investments from banks or private investments due to constant change when governments change, this creates a lot of doubt within our industry forcing it to reduce constantly. We have determined that Self-Assessable Codes have been very useful, time efficient and much more cost effective than lodging applications.

We have worked with numerous environmental issues regarding vegetation management on our property, we have fenced off creek systems and dams to avoid erosion, we have careful management practises in place to eradicate weeds and encourage natural growth. We selectively blade-rough areas of our property which has resulted in grass growth doubling, proving this practise is working well. If these new regulations and legislation were introduced this would have a major impact on these areas being returned with regrowth trees.

Within our grazing operation, we also incorporate planting numerous trees around our property on a yearly basis to demonstrate the level of care and high standard for environmental standards that we apply to our property, please note that this is all done at an extra cost to us.

If these amendments are passed, it will severely affect our business with regards to productivity resulting in decreased income levels. We will also have a reduced requirement to engage contractors to do this work on our property but most importantly it saddens us that our managerial role in running our own business could be taken away from us which results in a mental toughness questing being asked.....why are we continuing to do this? When clearly there is no level of appreciation or respect being portrayed for our own farmers and producers by the Australian Government or the Australian public.

Australia has many wonderful prosperities and opportunities with it's rich and wonderful fertile soils, but without management and encouragement, production can cease very quickly along with everybody's mental state of mind. Please reconsider introducing these unnecessary and unwelcomed regulations.

Signed:	Michael & Kellie Silvester
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