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22 March 2018

State Development, Natural Resources and Agricultural Industry Development Committee
Parliament House
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Committee Members

RE: Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018

Bundaberg CANEGROWERS has concern with some of the flagged changes to the Vegetation Management Act, namely,

The Irrigated High Value Agriculture and High Value Agriculture regulation requiring a permit to clear for irrigated and cropping purposes should stay in place without change. A permit to clear under this regulation is highly regulated with appropriate soil and climatic information required before a permit is granted. To demonstrate the appropriateness of the current regulation in the period from December 2013 until February 2018 only 5,600 hectares was approved for clearing. It is 0.0039% of the agricultural production area in Queensland. Using the information listed in the Land Account: Queensland, Experimental Estimates, 2011 – 2016 from the Australian Bureau of Statistics there was 542,675 hectares of irrigated agricultural land in 2014-15 and this was a decrease of 39,069 hectares from the 2010-11 period. Therefore an increase of 5,600 hectares is a 1.03% increase from the 2014-15 figures, however still a decrease of the area of irrigated agriculture from 2010-11.

Additional information from the same source shows that rainfed lands decreased 0.2% from 2010-11 (5.6M hectares) to 2014-15 (5.4M hectares). The majority of this land is rainfed pasture and it is this land type that suffered the loss of area. Rainfed cropping and sugar has been constant 1.4M hectares. Any clearing under the high value agriculture regulation had shown no impact on the total land under rainfed cropping and sugar.

<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4609.0.55.003Main%20Features32011%20-%202016?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=4609.0.55.003&issue=2011%20-%202016&num=&view=>

Consequence of Vegetation Management Act on Biofuels future

The Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018 proposed changes will hamper the development of the feedstock for Biofuel/ Biofutures Precinct in Gladstone. It is understood that the biofuel plant is looking for bagasse (fibre produced as by-product of

cane milling) as a feedstock for the plant. There is currently no bagasse available for sale to the biofuel plant.

The only way to provide bagasse or other sugarcane by-products for the biofutures plant is to grow more sugarcane.

Competition for existing land in the Bundaberg region from tree crop and sweet potato producers has decreased the area of sugarcane supplying the Bundaberg Sugar mills from 38,000 hectares in 1999 to 19,260 hectares in 2017. Tree clearing for either irrigated high value agriculture or high value agriculture on suitable soils is the main way of increasing the land area to sugarcane to provide fuel for the biofutures plant in Gladstone.

One way to grow enough feedstock for the Gladstone Biofuels plant is to grow sugarcane specifically for use in the plant. Sugar Research Australia has developed varieties of sugarcane which have high fibre and generally lower sugar content specifically for biofuel or bioenergy use. These canes are generally unsuitable for the production of crystal sugar and so to grow this type of sugarcane, additional land will need to be developed including the clearing of new land. It would be preferred if this clearing could occur under the Irrigated High Value Agriculture or High Value Agriculture regulations.

Other sources of biomass such as cane trash or broad acre crop stubble also have issues without an increase in land available to cropping. Currently the majority of spare cane trash is baled and processed to become the cane trash bales purchased at Bunnings and other hardware stores. The company that processes and bales the trash needs to be able to respond to increased demand, and to supply challenges in the Bundaberg region such as those resulting from the October 2017 rainfall event.

Expansion of Category R and Category C vegetation and impacts on Burnett Mary region

Currently the Burnett Mary region is exempt from “Reef Regulations” due to the minimal impact on the reef from both grazing and cane production. Additional legislation to reduce clearing and thinning within either 50 meters of a waterway or 100 meters of a major waterway may actually have a perverse impact by increasing the amount of sediments that enter waterways and make their way to the ocean and onto the eastern coastline, the Great Barrier Reef.

Observations in the majority of ecosystems show that the best way to reduce erosion, especially stream bank and gully erosion is a mixture of grass and tree cover to stabilize both the soil surface and at depth. This is backed up by the grazing component of Reef Water Quality Project 2013-2015 and Reef Trust III 2016-2019 where the projects look at groundcover as a combination of grass, herbage, understory and trees to stabilize the bank. If the thickening that occurs is unable to be thinned due to this legislation, there will be a perverse outcome where grass, herbage and understory vegetation will disappear and more sediment will enter the waterways affecting the streams, rivers, dams and the Great Barrier Reef.

The impact on urban creep/sprawl

Many of the areas that are now suburbs in Bundaberg grew cane prior to “growing houses”. This has reduced the amount of good agricultural land that was cleared historically around Bundaberg. As the City of Bundaberg and the seaside towns of Bargara, Burnett Heads, Elliott Heads, Innes Park and Coral Cove continue to grow, much of their development growth is focussed on agricultural land. As this land is removed from agricultural production further clearing and development of land is required to continue agricultural production in the food bowl for South East Qld. One of the perverse consequences of losing the agricultural land close to Bundaberg, especially between Bundaberg and Bargara is that this is highly productive land and to get the equivalent production from newly cleared (if permitted) land it will require more land area to be cleared.

I have also attached correspondence received from Bundaberg Fruit & Vegetable Growers which is also relevant to this issue.

Please contact me should I be able to provide clarification and/or further information.



Allan Dingle
Chairman



cc Bree Grima Managing Director BFVG
cc Member for Burnett Mr Stephen Bennett
cc Member for Bundaberg Mr David Batt



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DATE: 16 March, 2018

Dale Holliss

Manager, Bundaberg CANEGROWERS

Ref: MD01-160318

RE: VEGETATION MANAGEMENT BILL

Dear Dale,

As you're aware changes to the Vegetation Management Bill will negatively affect the Agriculture Industry. Specifically, the removal of purpose for High Value Agriculture and Irrigated High Value Agriculture in addition to changes to thinning guidelines is of concern to the horticulture Industry.

The short six week review period is also of concern; we therefore feel Industry is required to collaborate to present a unified view of the Bill.

BFVG is working very closely with the Queensland Horticulture Council which is administered by Growcom on this topic of which Bowen Gumlu Growers Association, Lockyer Valley Growers, Mareeba District Growers and Gayndah Growers Association are also members. Our recent teleconference confirmed all organisations' commitment to challenge this legislation.

An objective evidence-based approach is required to deliver a sustainable solution for Industry and as a collective we are keen to observe the economics that support the Bill. We do not believe the perceived outcomes of reduced carbon emissions, habitat destruction and reef pollution will overcome the loss of Industry opportunity.

We welcome feedback from Bundaberg CANEGROWERS on your view of the Bill and understand you'll be providing a submission to the Committee as will the Queensland Horticulture Council. BFVG Chair Allan Mahoney has been in touch with both Stephen Bennett MP and David Batt MP and has their verbal support of our submission. We encourage Bundaberg CANEGROWERS to mention the additional impact to the horticulture Industry this Bill in its current form will have and likewise we can include the cane Industry in our submission.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bree Grima".

Bree Grima
Managing Director

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