

SUBMISSION

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

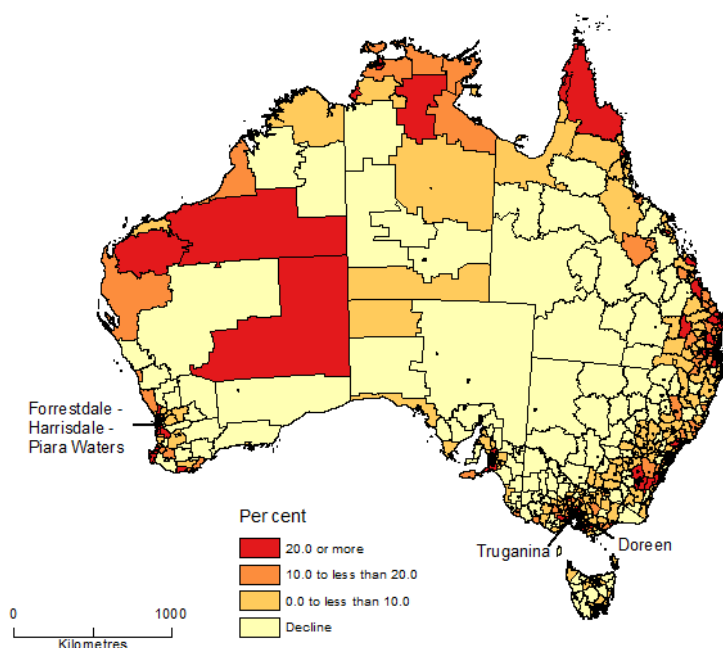
1. Removing High Value Agriculture and Irrigated High Value Agriculture from the Vegetation Management Framework

The 2017 edition of the National Farmers Federation (NFF) report “Food, Fibre & Forestry Facts” noted the following based on data collected in 2016-17:

- 304,200 people directly employed in agriculture with the complete supply chain providing 1.6 million jobs
- Approximately 85,700 farm business in Australia with around 99% owned and operated by Australians.
- Australian farmers produce around 93% of Australia’s domestic food supply and export around 77% of what they produce (2016-17 value approximately \$45 billion).
- The gross value of Australian farm production in 2016-17 was \$60 billion
- Australian farmers manage around 48% of Australia’s land mass with 94% of farmers actively undertaking natural resource management.
- In the 20 years between 1996-2016 Australian primary industries reduced greenhouse gas emission intensity by a huge 63% and have led the way in decreasing water consumption as well (down 7% from 2013-14 to 2014-15 alone)
- Areas managed for conservation are continually growing (currently 18% of the country’s land mass).

The 2016 census revealed that around 90% of Australia’s population reside in urban areas, with population declining in rural areas as demonstrated in the map below

(source: <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3218.0>)

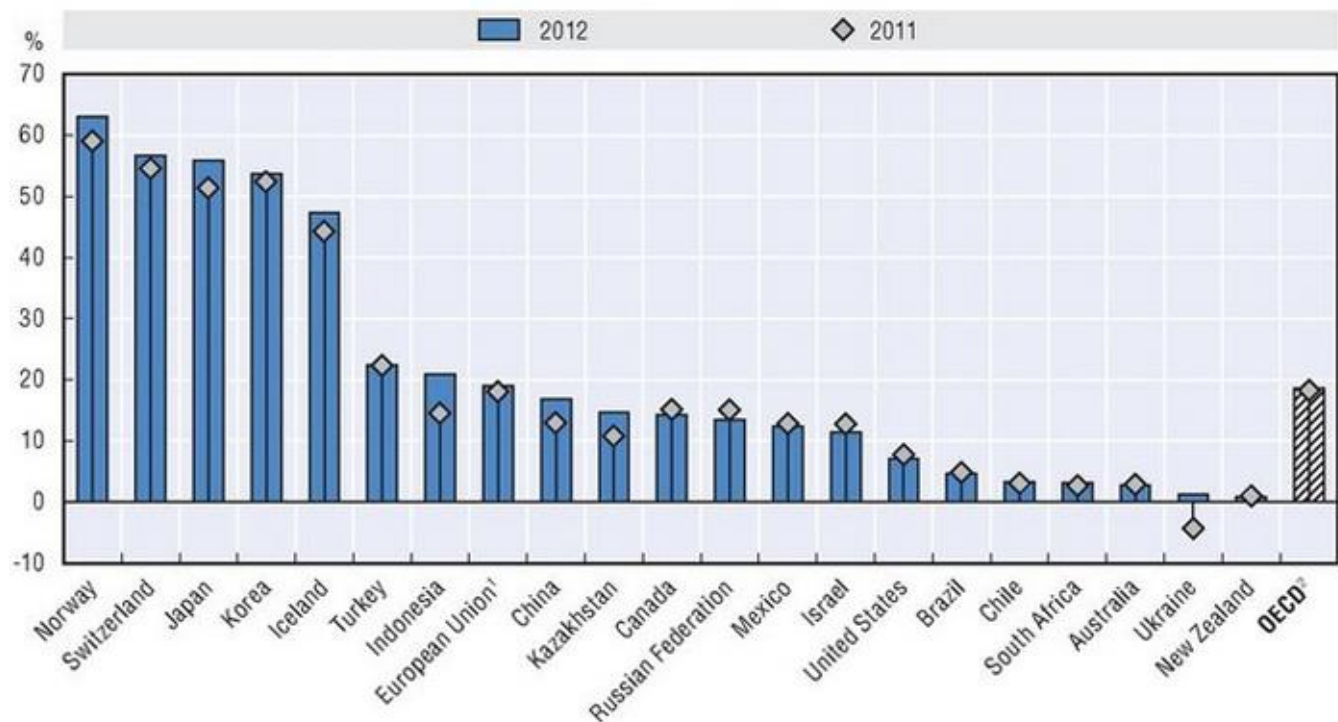


With population increasing by approximately 1.8% over the 10 year period to 2016, this places more pressure on urban centres contributing to urban sprawl. Add this to the increasing and valid demand to conserve land. The result is increased pressure on arable land. Farmers are constantly reminded that we need to double our food

production by 2050 to feed the masses and there is great rewards in doing so with potential to increase GDP and employment for people in rural areas, thus relieving some pressure from urban areas. Increasing productivity via efficiency can only go so far, with Australian farmers among the very most efficient despite (and maybe due to) being the second-least subsidised in the OECD (behind NZ) (source: 'Agricultural Policy Monitoring and Evaluation 2013' published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development)

Figure 2.2. Producer Support Estimates by country, 2011 and 2012

Per cent of gross farm receipts



Removing High Value Agriculture and Irrigated High Value Agriculture from the Vegetation Management Framework will have a negative impact upon this country's ability to sustainably grow the agricultural industry, effectively stifling its potential. This will particularly impact North Queensland which has great potential for development to meet these future demands. This is a short-sighted proposal which neglects the good work done by NRM bodies in the North in maintaining the balance between development and conservation. The impact upon The Great Barrier Reef is of course a critical concern in this matter but it must be acknowledged that such issues as sediment runoff are not desirable for producers from a sustainability aspect and it is in their very best interests to manage issue such as these.

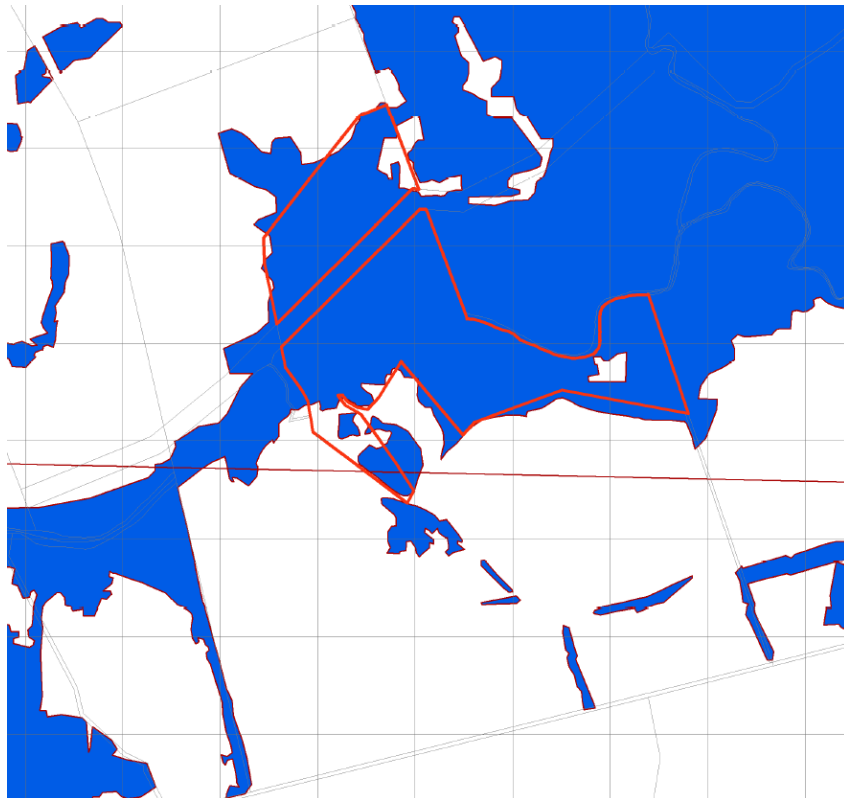
2. Including High Value Regrowth as an additional layer of regulation under the Vegetation Management Framework on leasehold, freehold and indigenous land

We are young farmers in our 30s. In the last two years we have undertaken a significant amount of debt [REDACTED] to purchase rural property and complete a family succession plan which has seen us take ownership of our business from the last generation, thereby allowing their retirement. Our properties were valued and subsequently mortgaged by a commercial bank. Land values take the property's Property Map of Assessable Vegetation (PMAV) into account. The proposed changes see part of our previously categorised 'X' change to protected 'C' category (as per below):

Proposed changes:



PMAV:



While in our case this proposed change only impacts a relatively small proportion of our property (8ha of 2,434ha or 0.3%) it threatens to set a dangerous precedent and creates a substantial amount of uncertainty. How can we be sure that the Government will not claim more land in order to appease international treaty targets in the future? Changes like this erode confidence; both our own and our Bank's.

Having only recently purchased this property (November 2017) we had not had the opportunity to develop this land. With the goal posts constantly changing we are uncertain what our future looks like and, frighteningly, we have invested a lot in order to stay on the land to make a living with the intention to raise a family and stay in this community indefinitely. We are currently a productive, sustainable tax-paying business that contributes to the economy. Legislation like this reduces our ability to continue to do so.

3. 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

It is almost unbelievable to learn that the reclassification of productive arable land capable of producing food and fibre is being done in order to fulfil commitments made to international treaties such as the Paris Protocol. Even more unbelievable is the reality that while this land will be made virtually unusable to the landholder, he/she will not be compensated for this, despite the fact that they have paid market value for this land. This is the situation we find ourselves in - having paid a commercial rate for land that we now cannot develop and are restricted in using. This is beyond comprehension. In what “real world” situation would this otherwise happen?

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

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 my opinion, the proposed changes to the management of vegetation as set out in this bill do not adhere to this standard. This area, which is so critical to the sustainability of agriculture, is amended with each change of government and agenda. The constant changes continue to erode business confidence in the rural industry, impacting upon investment and succession plans. Businesses have millions of dollars of debt tied up with these investments and assets with these changes threatening both sides of the balance sheet to a point where some become untenable and uneconomical. The proposed changes are simply not fair. Unfortunately, the rural people are small in population and it seems their voices are being drowned out by those of their city cousins who have little understanding for the consequences that legislation will bring to the fragile economies and ecosystems in rural Australia.

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



The proposed changes to vegetation management as set out in the Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018 are manifestly unfair to farmers. The vast majority of farmers actively undertake natural resource management. It is a simple fact that if they do not manage their farm in an environmentally sustainable manner they will go out of business. Farming is a multi-generational business and those that are most familiar with the land and its geographical idiosyncrasies should be given the ability and the freedom to manage it. A perfect example of this is the mulga lands of western Queensland. If not selectively cleared, the mulga tree will grow to canopy closure, choking out understories of smaller bushes and native grasses, directly impacting native animals such as kangaroos and wallabies by reducing or eliminating their food supply. This not only reduces biodiversity; the reduction in ground cover contributes to increased runoff and erosion, impacting the many waterways and channels that run through the properties and on to river systems. Selective clearing of the mulga trees does not kill them, it simply reduces their thickness to enable a healthy ecosystem to flourish. In years gone by, these trees were managed by fire with aboriginals using this control measure to reduce forestation and negative impacts upon biodiversity. After clearing or cutting the mulga tree regenerates over a number of years (5-10). In the meantime, cleared mulga trees are a source of fodder for livestock. This enables businesses to carry on in vast tracts of land in Western Queensland that would be useful for little else. These businesses enable the existence of small rural towns by supporting local businesses, which in turn enable other industries such as tourism. These businesses all contribute to the State and Federal

economies and are sustainable, if given the chance to continue managing their resources the way they know how rather than having to operate under restrictions imposed by those who do not have any experience in managing these fragile ecosystems.

The constant changes to the vegetation management legislation are unfair, creating uncertainty and contributing to a lack of confidence which stifles growth, development and sustainability measures. Businesses impacted by this legislation become classed as 'more risky', increasing costs such as borrowing and reducing investment.

The proposed vegetation management changes impact the triple bottom line adversely;

1. **Economic value:** the viability and economic sustainability of many rural businesses and those that they support along the supply chain will be negatively impacted. Stifling new regulations and restrictions will provide negative economic value. The constant changes to this legislation are eroding confidence which accordingly reduces investment; a further detractor from economic value. Australian farmers are already the second least subsidised in the developed world, having to compete against countries who receive a helping hand from their governments. These proposed changes will add a further layer of costs and restrictions to already struggling businesses.
2. **Social responsibility:** lawmakers are obligated to make laws fair. The proposed changes to this legislation are unfair on those that have invested their livelihoods and future in the rural properties that they own and manage. They will create inequality by applying onerous regulations on rural businesses which will in turn impact the social fabric of the communities that these businesses are a part of.
3. **Environmental impact:** ironically, these laws that are being introduced under the guise of environmental responsibility are in many cases going to contribute to the degradation of the environment. This is particularly so in the management of the mulga lands where strategic thinning is imperative to the maintenance of the biodiversity and sustainability of those ecosystems. This will directly impact our native species by reducing their food supplies.

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| Address: |  |
| Date: | 21/03/2018 |