

State Development, Natural Resources and Agricultural Industry Development Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE Qld 4000

By email: [REDACTED]

Rob Atkinson's submission to the State Development, Natural Resources and Agricultural Industry Development Committee regarding the Nature Conservation (Special Wildlife Reserves) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018

Dear Committee Members

I am a Beef Producer in Central Western Queensland. I have almost 40 years experience living and working in the bush, in most parts of Queensland. As a beef producer my primary goal is to grow as much grass as I can, primarily over the 'wet season', to allow my livestock to have sufficient fodder to exist until the next wet season and beyond.

Firstly, it must be noted that the whole farming and grazing fraternity is frustrated and utterly sick and tired of the continual changes to and threats to our livelihoods by radical environmentalists.

I have no qualms with the government's wish to increase the size of the National Park Estate. So long as you offer landholders and tenants, fair, industry relevant, compensation for their land, including leasehold land, fair enough. However, it must be acknowledged all governments have failed to manage the existing portfolio of National Parks. In almost every case, National Parks are breeding grounds for noxious plants, feral animals and bush fires. So, if you intend increasing the National Park portfolio or placing greater environmental regulations on farmers and graziers, you should financially support the correct and proper management of the land that the Government is affecting.

While on National Parks, I would suggest that your Rangers use fire much more regularly than they currently do. After all, that is how aborigines managed the land. Fire was a constant tool that aborigines used to find food and slaughter animals. Read 'Leichhardt's Journal of an Overland Expedition'. Fire was a constant. Unfortunately widespread controlled burning probably goes against the wishes of most environmentalists.

I would hazard a guess, that most of you sitting on this committee haven't a clue how we manage a grazing enterprise. It is a proven fact that less grass grows under trees. Trees do not prevent erosion as well as a good stand of grass does. Farmers must be allowed to manage their regrowth to encourage grass growth. Simple fact. Isn't that what this committee wants, less sediment runoff?

The committee must also acknowledge the fact that once regrowth reaches the stage where it affects the amount of grass produced, the farmer is financially impacted and some management and biosecurity issues arise. Financially, because the farm is unable to produce historically achievable grass tonnage, carrying capacity is reduced. So if the government reduces a farmer's income, wouldn't it be the governments responsibility to compensate for lost production?

The biosecurity effect is when regrowth reaches a stage where it is of similar height and thickness of virgin scrub, it is very difficult to manage livestock and feral animals. Cattle are harder to muster and can become feral, and feral animals are offered a haven and breeding ground.

So my first observation is, 'Why are people who have no idea how farmers manage their farms, making laws that affect farmers?'

That's right, you want to protect the Great Barrier Reef.

We all want to protect the GBR.

But firstly, you need to acknowledge that only approximately 25% of the land area of Queensland drains into the Coral Sea. You are making these environmental changes to 100% of our state. So why are you including the 75% of Queensland that either runs into the MDB, Lake Eyre or the Gulf of Carpentaria?

If the GBR is your primary concern, the proposed changes to regrowth management should only effect the 25% of the state that flows to the Coral Sea.

I would suggest that there is zero runoff into the Coral Sea from Mulga country. I would also ask the committee, 'Do any of you know what Mulga is or even looks like?'

There is also the major consideration of drought. Committee members, are you aware that at least 80% of Queensland has been in severe drought for 5 years or more. Although it has rained in many parts of Queensland, there are still many landholders who are suffering from drought. The decade leading up to this drought saw historically low returns for beef producers. Most landholders have been unable to afford to manage regrowth at this time of poor returns and drought. It would only be responsible government to exempt the drought declared regions from these legislative changes.

There is no doubt a large portion of Queensland has been cleared for food production. After all, it is not that many years ago that farmers were required to clear a percentage of their land to meet Government requirements. We all know that our population is increasing quickly and that these people have to be fed and clothed. So it is reasonable to accept that the clearing of productive land for food production or clothing is required. After all, we all eat and wear clothes.

Is the committee aware that a big percentage of Queensland is naturally treeless?

Is the committee aware that the introduced tree, Prickly Acacia, was brought to Australia by the Queensland Government and landholders were encouraged to spread the seed? This noxious plant now colonises millions of hectares of Queensland that historically was treeless.

Is the committee aware that in the last two decades, graziers, particularly in the highly productive brigalow and softwood scrub country have nurtured a leguminous browse tree, Leucaena?

Hundreds of thousands of hectares are now under leucaena production.

Why doesn't this committee take a new tack? Why not work with farmers and graziers to develop large areas of these fodder tree crops? Much of this development would occur in the area of Queensland that drains into the Coral Sea. They are perennial plants, they increase the fertility of the soil, increase livestock production, are cultivated in rows with grass growth between the rows. Everyone wins, there is more employment, greater animal production, improved farmer income, maybe some drought mitigation. Remember that a large percentage of agricultural product is exported, earning much needed export dollars for our state economy.

So that is my suggestion to this committee. Find a way to work with farmers and graziers. Don't come in with a jackboot approach. No one benefits from heavy handed Government demands. If this committee can find sensible neutral ground, maybe everyone can find a positive result to environmental improvements.

Rob Atkinson

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