Good morning Mr Charmain and Members of the Committee. My name is Peter McNaughton and I would like to thank you for the opportunity to address everyone today. I am here to speak on behalf of the Coalstoun Lakes Development Group Inc. Coalstoun Lakes is situated in the North Burnett, between Biggenden and Gayndah. Its highly fertile red volcanic soil was formed more than six hundred thousand years ago, by some of the youngest volcanic formations in Australia.

The total area of the valley is about six thousand hectares, of which about three thousand hectares is currently being dryland farmed to produce high value crops such as peanuts, maize, mungbeans, and other broadacre cereal crops. There is very limited underground irrigation water. Some horticultural crops such as watermelons and avocados being grown on a limited scale. The remaining land is used for cattle grazing. Currently, total revenue produced from the District is in excess of five million dollars per annum. However, Paradise Dam is only 26kms away and it has 100,000 mega litres of water sitting there which is unsold and not being used, one of the main aims of our group is to lobby for the construction of an irrigation scheme into Coalstoun Lakes. This would rejuvenate the North Burnett Area creating hundreds of Jobs and providing economic growth to the region in excess of one hundred million dollars per annum. All of our members including myself are farmers from the Coalstoun Lakes district.

Whilst the group has not made a formal submission to your committee we believe the proposed legislation is entirely unacceptable and there will be negative economic impacts for every farmer in Queensland. We support submissions opposing this Amendment Bill, in particular those made by the North Burnett Regional Council, Agforce and Dr Bill Burrows. We also concur with the submissions made by the Queensland Law Society particularly those relating Breach’s of the fundamental legislative principles and the inconsistencies that this Bill has with section 4(3)(g) of the Legislative Standards Act 1992. It is appalling that the Government have chosen not to consult Stakeholders specifically on this Amendment Bill as noted on page 9 of the Explanatory notes accompanying the Bill.

Our entire district is currently classified as High Value Agriculture (HVA). We believe the removal of (HVA) provisions from the legislation will have no positive effect on our district.

If any of you have ever driven through Coalstoun Lakes, you cannot miss the massive piles of volcanic rock that has been painstakingly shifted over the years to enable areas to be cultivated. This district was first settled in the early 1900’s, Farmers in this area have been picking up rocks for a long time, some of them are now into the 5th generation. Fortunately, these days with larger earthmoving machines the process has become less back breaking, however it doesn’t come cheap. Current estimates by a local earthmoving company to shift rock piles, thus allowing new cultivation areas to be opened is around $5000-$6000 per hectare. At current land prices, the cost to clear land is almost as much as purchasing the property in the first place. For most of the farmers in our area, shifting rock piles, which can contain some regrowth timber can only be carried out when they have had a few profitable seasons in a row. This has only occurred twice in the last ten years. The removal of the HVA provisions will greatly inhibit and negatively impact future agriculture production from this area.
Extending category R provisions to include regrowth vegetation in watercourse and drainage areas in the Burnett-Mary catchments will also adversely affect agriculture in our district. A significant percentage of the land farmed in our districts is adjacent to water ways and creeks, this is possible and sustainable because of the extensive network of contour banks that have been constructed over the years. Many of these banks were established in the 1960's and 70s with the help of Government extension officers from the Department of Agriculture as it was back then. This occurred in a time when the Government was helping farmers improve their land, not trying to impose legislation for political agendas, which is scientifically flawed. Unfortunately, we have no access to the funding provided to farmers in the Fitzroy basin and other Great Barrier Reef catchment areas that have enabled them to improve land management and their farming practices.

In regard to proposed changes to high value regrowth vegetation, by now you should be well aware that most of the activities carried out by farmers are to control and manage land that has been previously cleared of vegetation. This is no different in our area and imposing further restrictions on the management of regrowth will significantly impact the productivity and profitability of our district, along with most of the agricultural enterprises right across Queensland.

Unfortunately, I was unable read all the submissions made to the committee, As I am sure you are aware there is only about four hundred published on the Parliamentary website. I understand there has been over sixteen thousand submissions made, I dare say that most them oppose the Bill. This figure alone must ring some alarm bells within the committee, especially given the fact that there was only nine days for submissions to be made.

Committee members, hopefully by the time you read all of the submissions, and after the hearings are complete you have some grasp of what rural landholders and farmers think of this proposed legislation, if not, you’re not doing your job properly.

If this Amendment Bill is passed in its current form there is no doubt it will have severe and adverse impacts on the agricultural industry in Queensland forevermore. After reading through transcripts of the hearings already conducted and many of the published submissions, to me it is clear that a strong message needs to be sent back to the Government from the farmers of Queensland not to implement this legislation. Based on the evidence before you, not your political persuasion, your report to the Parliament shouldn’t take too long to write. All it needs to say is that the Bill should be rejected, and that the Government needs to put aside their political agendas and work with landholders rather than against them to draft legalisation, that doesn’t stop farmers from managing their land in a sustainable way.