



TRANSPORT AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr CG Whiting MP—Acting Chair
Mr JR Martin MP (virtual)
Mr LL Millar MP
Mr LA Walker MP (virtual)
Mr PT Weir MP

Staff present:

Ms D Jeffrey—Committee Secretary (virtual)
Mr R Hansen—Committee Secretary
Mr Z Dadic—Assistant Committee Secretary

PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO THE LAND AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2022

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

FRIDAY, 8 APRIL 2022

Brisbane

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The committee met at 10.10 am.

ACTING CHAIR: I declare this public hearing open for the committee's inquiry into the Land and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. My name is Chris Whiting. I am the substitute chair for the committee for today's proceedings and the member for Bancroft.

I would like to begin by respectfully acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today and pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging. We are fortunate to live in a country with two of the oldest continuing cultures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples whose lands, winds and waters we all share.

With me today are Lachlan Millar, member for Gregory and deputy chair; James Martin, member for Stretton via videoconference; Les Walker, member for Mundingburra via videoconference; and Mr Pat Weir, member for Condamine. The member for Toowoomba North is an apology for today's proceedings.

This hearing is a proceeding of the Queensland parliament and is subject to the parliament's standing rules and orders. Only the committee and invited witnesses may participate in the proceedings. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath or affirmation, but I remind witnesses that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence. I also remind members of the public that they may be excluded from the briefing at the discretion of the committee. These proceedings are being recorded and broadcast live on the parliament's website. Media may be present and are subject to the committee's media rules and the chair's directions at all times. You may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings and images may appear on the parliament's website or on social media pages. Please turn your mobile phones off or on to silent mode.

RUHLE, Mr Nathan, Lead-Intergovernmental Relations-Advocate, Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ)

SMITH, Ms Alison, Chief Executive Officer, Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) (via video conference)

ACTING CHAIR: I now welcome representatives from the Local Government Association of Queensland. Good morning to you both. I invite you to make an opening statement before we start with our questions.

Ms Smith: Good morning, chair and committee. Thank you for inviting us to participate in today's public hearing and thank you for the ability for me to do so online. I would also like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we gather and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. My name is Alison Smith. I am CEO of the Local Government Association of Queensland which is the peak body for all 77 councils across Queensland. We are a not-for-profit organisation. We are established to serve the interests of the 77 members. We have been in existence since 1896. That is 126 years which is not quite as long as stock routes have been in existence which is about 150 years. We are really pleased to have been invited today. In the room is my colleague from the LGAQ, Nathan Ruhle. We very much welcome these reforms; they have been a long time coming.

I would like to go through a little bit of background insofar as our submission. Our member councils have been seeking stock route reform for several decades now to ensure the future sustainability of the network which, as I said, is some 150 years old. They comprise about 70,000 kilometres of roads, reserves, corridors on pastoral leases, on state land and dedicated reserve which are used to move stock on foot, as well as provide emergency agistment. The network provides feed for the agri-industry, as well as some major infrastructure, transport of water, power and communication, plus they also have some significant native flora and fauna, remnant vegetation and cultural heritage.

As the committee knows, local government have responsibility for managing stock routes, yet our concern has always been that it is the ratepayers who carry the majority of the burden just because the current fee structure has not changed in some 20 years or so. When you think about Brisbane

ratepayers, it is important that you think about some of Queensland's smallest rural and remote councils. Many of them do not have enough own-sourced revenue as it is to adequately sustain their existing and planned operational budgets.

There are three reasons why a review of this legislation is of significant interest to Queensland councils. The first reason is it is local government who are responsible for the day-to-day management and overall compliance of the network. Their responsibility is to maintain assets, issue permits for travelling stock and agistment, ensure compliance with those permit conditions, manage weeds, fire risk and other capital work.

The second reason is it costs councils around \$4.8 million a year to manage the stock route network, but they have very limited capacity to recoup costs.

The third reason is, for several decades, the LGAQ has been seeking legislative reform to provide a more fair and equitable fee mechanism to ensure that local government is resourced to manage this really important work so that the network will continue to operate for the next 150 years.

I would like to firmly state how pleased the LGAQ is because we think the reforms being introduced in this legislation will enable a much more fair and equitable system that will ensure the network is maintained. While we will welcome these changes, it remains the case that councils will still play a major role to fund and maintain the network, however what is proposed will go a long way to alleviate that burden on ratepayers.

I also thank the Department of Resources for its genuine and extensive consultation on these changes, through everything from the 2019 consultation process, the July 2021 discussion paper and the more recent discussions as part of the Queensland Stock Route Management Working Group.

Overall, the LGAQ supports the changes that are proposed under this bill, including the ability for local governments to charge an application fee and to retain 100 per cent of the revenue from permit fees as a way of recouping some of the costs associated with managing the stock route network. We also really appreciate the changes proposed which includes the flexibility to waive these fees in the case of hardship such as drought.

Our submission proposed eight recommendations to support local governments, graziers and landholders in implementing the reforms. Is the committee happy for me to briefly run through our recommendations?

ACTING CHAIR: Yes, that will be fine.

Ms Smith: In relation to the declaration of stock routes, the first recommendation is that the Department of Resources develops consistent communication and education tools for all stakeholders. We ask for this because we believe that it is a burden on individual local government officers who have to respond to concerns and questions about grazing on stock routes that are not even identified on map.

The second is about a map amendment process which would sit outside of the legislative framework to support input by local government to ensure that map updates are more timely and can occur without requiring legislative amendment.

The third recommendation is for additional consultation for local governments about the extent and classification of the stock route network. We ask for this because we see that it could include defining appropriate service levels for each category of the stock route, and that would build then on the consultation framework that was identified in the 2019 consultation paper and would also support the implementation of the Queensland Stock Route Network Management Strategy 2020-2025.

Our fourth recommendation is to support the proposed changes to the process for preparing a local government stock route management plan that could align planned time frames to that of the Stock Route Network Management Strategy 2020-2025. There are many changes within this. I will not go through them all, but some of those include removing the need for the minister to have to consider a local government draft stock route network management plan, or to allow local governments to publish the draft plan using relevant local media, these days due to the declining presence of print media in many regional areas.

Recommendation 5 is that the Department of Resources ensures the proposed increase fee structure includes appropriate indexation within a revised regulation. While it's not specifically referenced in the bill, it is worth noting that the fees for travelling permits have not changed since 1989 simply because they are too low to be indexed. As I mentioned earlier, it costs about \$4.8 million per year for local governments to manage the entire stock route network. While councils can recoup

some of the management and maintenance costs by charging fees for travelling stock and agistment, the overall revenue captured in 2017 to 2018 was just \$324,000. The reality is that local governments are only recovering about four per cent of the costs which then fluctuates on seasonal demand.

Recommendation 6 is for further discussions between the state and local government beyond this review process to identify mechanisms for greater cost recovery for local government. These proposed reforms will help, but, as I have mentioned, they will not cover the full costs. The LGAQ would welcome the opportunity to work with the state government after this review to identify some other mechanisms for local government cost recovery.

Our second last recommendation, No. 7, is the LGAQ supporting the ability of local governments to charge a standard application fee for new travelling stock and agistment permit applications for greater cost recovery.

Finally, recommendation 8 is to support an amendment to the act to allow local governments to retain 100 per cent of the permit fees charged to assist with the sustainable management of the stock route network. As I have mentioned, local governments currently receive about half of the permit fees for agistment and for travel permits and water facility agreements as outlined in the act, with the other half currently going to the state government. Clause 67 of the bill allows for local governments to retain 100 per cent of the permit fees charged, and we strongly support this, as long as the capital works funding of the network is maintained or even increased by the Department of Resources each year, as it currently stands.

In closing, I want to restate that Queensland councils have been seeing reform for several decades to ensure the future sustainability of the network. It is a network that is 150 years old and our members are very focused on making sure that it can continue to be used well into the future. Thank you very much. Nathan and I are happy to take your questions.

ACTING CHAIR: I will go straight to the member for Gregory because he has a couple of questions. I will let him open the batting.

Mr MILLAR: Thank you to the LGAQ for your submission into something that we have all been trying to resolve since my time here in Parliament; this started in 2015. I do agree that local governments are getting absolutely hammered when it comes to maintaining the stock routes with only \$324,000 recovered in the 2017-18 financial year, and it costs \$4.8 million per annum. Is there a need for the state government to work collectively with the Local Government Association of Queensland to sort out a sinking fund from the state government in their contribution to be able to maintain pests and weeds and obviously infrastructure on these stock routes? I will get you to answer that first.

Ms Smith: I am happy to make a start. I believe this issue came up with the department the other day. We would be happy to have discussions around what the mechanism could look like. Our overriding principle is about the ongoing sustainability of the network, so we want to ensure that we could have some discussions about what this funding model, a sinking fund, might look to and what it might involve. It would be something where we would be happy to work with the state government, but, of course, look to consult with our members over as well. It may even be that there might be further mechanisms that could be identified which would allow for local government cost recovery. Again, we would be supportive of any consultation that we could be involved in for that. As I say, consulting with our members would be an imperative on an idea such as this. I defer to my colleague, Nathan, in case he has any further comments to make on this, thanks.

Mr Ruhle: As we said in our submission, we strongly welcome these changes, particularly in relation to the fee structure, because it does improve the balance and provides more support and cost recovery for local governments in maintaining the network. As we also said, we want to make sure that the state still contributes to the capital infrastructure required to maintain the network as well. Whether it is a sinking fund or other mechanisms, we would be open to those discussions with the state government in relation to what that ongoing, long-term sustainable funding model would look like. As Alison pointed out in her opening statement, these councils are the smallest rural councils in this state that have their own financial sustainability challenges as it is, so that is something that we are very cognisant of as an association.

Mr MILLAR: The reason for that question, too, is that we are looking at increased charges for agistment. Many times when people are taking stock on the road, it is because they are drought declared. They have limited funds, resources and cash to be able to maintain. It is a stressful time when families are broken up and on the road for four or six months just to try to keep their breeders alive. With all due respect, I would not want to see that this gets the green light, which it looks good, but then the government says, 'It is not us anymore. It is over to you, local government. You are getting 100 per cent of cost recovery, or what we see as cost recovery.' I think there is an obligation

for the state government to maintain a funding commitment into the stock routes to make sure that we do not put undue burden back on not only these local governments but also on people who are in a distressed time at the moment.

ACTING CHAIR: That is more of a comment than a question. Nathan or Alison, did you have anything to add on that?

Ms Smith: No, other than to agree with the sentiment. There is opportunity to look at further mechanisms. We are open to it. I did make the reference in my opening comments around the requirement for the state to uphold its continuing maintenance work. That is critical. Thank you.

ACTING CHAIR: I have a question which relates once again to the fee structure we have here. Recommendation 5 talks about the increased fee structure. There are a couple of things I would like to hear from you on. What has been the reaction of those western councils when you have talked about that ability to increase their fee structure? What has been their reaction or how are they sitting with this?

Ms Smith: I would need to take that on notice. I do not have that information in front of me at home, unless my colleague, Nathan, has anything he can contribute to that.

ACTING CHAIR: We do not need to take that on notice, but just an outline of what you have done with working with the western councils on this.

Mr Ruhle: We have been very cognisant of the councils who are impacted by the stock route and, as we have outlined and no doubt the department has as well in their briefing last week, there has been extensive consultation for a number of years through a number of different mechanisms. We have made sure that our members are front and centre as part of that, including being part of the stock route working group. They are broadly supportive of the changes and the need to improve cost recovery for them. One of the considerations is the number of stock that is travelling and, depending on which route, the use of that route. Depending on seasonal conditions and other issues, some routes are obviously more popular than others. While we welcome these changes, there are still opportunities, as we have said, to have a look at the long-term cost recovery model and to make sure that the route network is well maintained.

ACTING CHAIR: Following up on that, your recommendation 7 talks about the ability to set a standard fee. Would it not be easier for these western councils to set their own levels of fees, instead of a standard one? Perhaps some areas could have the ability or the capacity to raise a fee slightly higher? Is that something that they perhaps would benefit from? I can understand why they would need a standard fee, but perhaps some need to set their fees higher than others. Ms Smith?

Ms Smith: We are happy to take all issues for further consultation. My understanding is that it has just been talking about the existing arrangements which related to having had a standard fee. Nathan, did you have anything further you can share with the committee?

Mr Ruhle: Clause 65 of the bill essentially creates this process where there is the ability for local governments to have an application fee. What happened prior to these changes is that some local governments had local laws in place already that allowed them the ability to do this, but also the ability to waiver on hardship, based on seasonal conditions like drought, flood or other issues. There are 24 local governments that have stock route management plans, but there are others which are peripherally impacted as well by the network. It standardises that approach across all local governments impacted, which we support.

Mr WEIR: My question is in respect of recommendation 2, around the establishment of map amendment process. What do you mean by that? I would have thought it has been mapped and laid out. Do you see that that is going to be amended, or is there some dispute on some of the mapping?

Ms Smith: Again I will defer to Nathan for further comment on this, but as I mentioned in my opening statement, there are often times when questions will arise about areas that are not shown on maps. That is part of the issue that needs to be resolved. Nathan, did you have anything further on this one?

Mr Ruhle: Just to add that I think we are talking about the process of how maps are updated in terms of subordinate legislation, rather than primary legislation. It can be done in a more timely manner. That is one of the challenges that we are looking at and what the Department of Resources has flagged as an opportunity around ongoing need to amend maps so that everyone is clear of where the stock routes are.

Mr MILLAR: A fun fact on that: did you know that there is a stock route across the bridge here in Brisbane?

ACTING CHAIR: I cannot wait to see that in action. I am not sure what feed they will get on that stock route. Thank you for that, member for Condamine, and thank you for that, member for Gregory!

Mr MARTIN: My question was in relation to the total cost to councils. Alison, you mentioned it was a \$4.8 million cost to councils to administer the stock route system. Can you give the committee a broad outline of what makes up that \$4.8 million? What are the biggest expenses? I am not asking for a detailed budget, rather a broad outline of what makes up that \$4.8 million.

Ms Smith: There is a range of responsibilities that the councils have to fund. It is everything from resources in an office environment to deployment out in the field. There are about 48 local governments who have some parts of the stock route network that sit within their areas. Some of those responsibilities that they have to fund, that that \$4.8 million goes towards, includes the office work of the issuing of permits, the compliance work to ensure that those permit conditions are being maintained, and then there is the obvious maintenance of the routes themselves, which is the land management activity—pests, weeds, fire, fire risk, maintaining the water facilities that exist along the stock routes. That is just an example. I hope that answers your question.

Mr MARTIN: Yes, it does. One supplementary question, though: if the councils move to a fee structure that compensates them 100 per cent for the costs associated, have any of your members mentioned the possibility of passing that cost saving onto rate payers? Is that something that has been considered?

Mr Ruhle: I will clarify that one, Alison. It is 100 per cent of the application fee. There would still be out-of-pocket costs for councils and hence the need for us to talk about long-term, ongoing opportunities to make sure the network is well funded and maintained. As I said, and Alison said in her opening statement, while we welcome these long debated reforms, councils will still be out of pocket in some respect. It also depends on the actual number of travelling stock using the particular routes. In some areas they have not seen cattle through for a number of years. One mayor mentioned to me, when I was talking to him the other day, that 100 per cent of zero is zero. Those councils still obviously have outlays that they have to pay, managing and maintaining the network. I hope that clarifies the issue, member.

Mr WEIR: In regards to that—and I notice in your submission you talk about areas where there is low use of those routes—if there was any plan to relinquish any of that, what is your view on that?

Ms Smith: I might start and will again defer to Nathan for any follow-up comments. In all of our consultation with members, we have never talked about or supported relinquishing parts of the network. The stock route network is a network; it exists as it is with a variety of opportunities and access. The fundamental principles of the system is what we wish to maintain. It has lasted 150 years. It is seasonal, but that in itself does provide opportunity. Nathan, is there anything further you would like to add?

Mr Ruhle: No, other than that I am not aware that that proposal has been raised at all by either any of our members or by the department.

Mr WEIR: That is good to know because it is a network.

Mr WALKER: My question is in regards to recommendation No. 6 from the LGAQ's submission. Cost recovery will be a new application fee and will accrue a per-animal fee for usage. What are the other cost recovery opportunities that local governments might need for stock routes? I am curious as to whether the LGAQ has a different fee structure in mind?

Ms Smith: It has already been touched on in part of this hearing that the regulation contains fees that I have referred to already. I think, as at last week, the department referred to the fact that the new regulation would come after, assuming that this bill goes ahead as legislation. The current regulation expires in August of this year. There has already been a consultation paper for the new regulation that the department issued in March this year. It contains some proposals around the new fee arrangements which we support, particularly having the permit fees being indexed to annual indexation, which currently they have not been able to do because they are too low. I am not sure if that helps to answer your question, but I will defer to Nathan if he has anything further to add.

Mr Ruhle: I was going to say—and I think you touched on it earlier, Alison—that some of the other activities that are important in maintaining the network, including pest and weed control, animal control and other fire and hazard reduction management activities, need to occur. As I mentioned earlier, it often depends on the use of the network. The fees in the current regulation that are proposed to increase deal with agistment and the cost of travelling stock using the network, but some of those other costs that are important in maintaining that network is what we are talking about when we are

talking about the costs to local government in supporting the state as well. The state, through their support, fund capital infrastructure costs, particularly around water infrastructure as well. I think they have outlined that in their briefing the other day.

Ms Smith: Thank you, Nathan. Chair, could I add another comment, please?

ACTING CHAIR: Yes, certainly.

Ms Smith: It is also worth noting that even with these reforms as proposed, Queenslanders will still be paying far less for use of the stock route than what is perhaps charged in New South Wales. It is the case that council members of ours, such as Maranoa, have the situation where they have stock coming in from New South Wales because the cost to have cheap feed in Queensland is so much less than that in New South Wales. That is worth considering in this.

ACTING CHAIR: That is a very good point.

Mr MILLAR: To back up Alison's comment, in 2014 a bloke called Tom Brinkworth, a multimillionaire cattle baron from South Australia, used our stock routes from the Northern Territory all the way down to New South Wales and then sold the cattle. That took a lot of that feed and that opportunity away. We were going into drought in 2012, but were really into drought in 2014. That is something that I think the department, the LGAQ, AgForce and all of us have to take into some consideration as to how we use these stock routes because they are there for the welfare of keeping breeding cattle alive.

ACTING CHAIR: There being no further questions, nor any questions on notice, that concludes this part of the briefing. Thank you, Nathan and Alison.

GUERIN, Mr Michael, Chief Executive Officer, AgForce Queensland Farmers Limited

LEACH, Mr Greg, Senior Policy Advisor, AgForce Queensland Farmers Limited

HOFFMANN, Miss Nikki, Policy Officer, AgForce Queensland Farmers Limited (via videoconference)

CHAIR: I now welcome representatives from AgForce, Queensland Farmers Limited. Good morning. I invite you to make an opening statement, after which we will have questions for you.

Mr Guerin: Thank you, Chair, for the chance to appear before the committee this morning. AgForce Queensland Farmers is a peak organisation representing Queensland's cane, cattle, grain, sheep and wool producers. With the chair's indulgence, we would each like to give a brief opening statement.

We would like to thank the state government for the opportunity to be involved in the stakeholder consultation during the development of this amended bill. Overall, AgForce does not have any significant concerns regarding the intent of the proposed amendments, and the support of the government's intentions to streamline, reduce complexity and ensure regulatory frameworks remain efficient, effective and responsive to change.

I would like to hand over to Nikki Hoffmann to talk about the amendments of the Land Act 1994, the Land Regulation 2020, and amendments to the Stock Route Management Act 2002, and then to Greg Leach to talk to the amendments of the Vegetation Management Act 1999, the accepted development vegetation clearing code, the amendment of section 20D, and the certified Regional Ecosystem Description Database for this act, the parts where they have done the deep work. Firstly, Nikki, over to you.

Miss Hoffmann: AgForce is supportive of the amendments to the Land Act and the Land Regulation. AgForce is particularly supportive of the introduction of an alternative, more efficient pathway to initiate lease conversions so that it is not solely an applicant-driven process. Freehold land offers far greater security to landholders with the removal of risk of excessive annual rent increases as has been seen in the past.

In relation to the amendments to the Stock Route Management Act, AgForce acknowledges the efforts by the Queensland government to review the management legislation and regulation of the state's vital stock route network and meet the needs and expectations of industry and other stakeholders. We have appreciated the inclusion of AgForce representatives in a stock route management working group and a renewal of the consultation on the regulation review, given delays due to COVID-19. AgForce supports the proposed amendments to the Stock Route Management Act. I will now hand over to Greg to talk to the points in relation to the Vegetation Management Act.

Mr Leach: There is a little bit of detail to go through here. At the outset I will try to give an overall perspective of these following comments. The AgForce committee has been extremely supportive of the Queensland government's efforts, particularly through the Herbarium, in understanding and mapping the vegetation across the state and the regional ecosystems across the state and having those accurately identified because there is a whole legacy and history of that mapping being either semi correct, incorrect or so forth. We are very highly supportive of all efforts to improve the integrity of that science and to make that more available to all the decision-makers involved in managing those landscapes. On the corollary, we have some challenges in regard to the proposed changes in terms of how they start to introduce a large possibility of rapid change, rapid differences in the mapping interfering with the longer-term business planning of agricultural land managers, and in that context I would like to present these following findings.

With respect to the question: 'What is vegetation?' AgForce does not support clause 94 which changes the reference of a 'static prescribed regulation' to a 'constantly changing description database' to amend plans that are exempt within the VMA. Currently plants within grassland regional ecosystems, as listed in the schedules 4 and 5 of the VMA, are exempt. With any change to the regulation, we would suggest, in terms of following due process, that they need to follow the Queensland government guide to better regulation which requires regulatory impact analysis and public consultation rather than rapid change that has significant impacts to property businesses; that due process take place in good time.

Part of that question is about the requirement of landholders, in making decisions if things are rapidly changing, to have access to be able to check if those changes are impacting on their decision-making. We know that there are various considerations, questions and problems in terms of many land holders' ability to be kept abreast of the changes that are constantly going on in this regulatory framework.

Onto the accepted development of vegetation clearing code: we seek clarification of clause 96 as to how compliant clearing actually impacts on other relevant purposes in the act that are listed in section 22A. We are concerned that coordinated projects are outside the scope of the clearing codes and referral stages of the Sustainable Planning Act. We are wanting to make sure that there is correlation there and an understanding of how that is happening.

The amendments of section 20D: Clause 98 amends section 20D(3)(b) to amend the editor's note to reflect the current amendments. This editor's note identified the change to regional ecosystem is made by amending the Vegetation Management Regulation 2012. As mentioned for the clauses as above, AgForce does not support change to the regional ecosystems through an updated regional ecosystem database. That can happen instantly with potentially large consequences for landholders which they may not be aware of for some time. Any changes in the regional ecosystem should remain within the Vegetation Management Regulation 2012, as described, and only be changed through those protocols that we were mentioning before, so that there is a governance process that goes on that is all in good time, and allows for better visibility of landholders and other decision-makers on vegetation management.

Onto section 22L in terms of certifying regional ecosystem description database for this act: clause 101 inserts a new section 22L. As previously mentioned above, for clauses 94 and 98, AgForce does not support change in the regional ecosystem through an updated REDD. Any change in this ecosystem status should remain within regulation 2012, as described before, and that there only be change through government protocols for the regulatory changes. Currently, regional ecosystem mapping is being revised annually. We would know that with the advantages of technology today, we can change things—and the Herbarium does—quite rapidly and quickly. We certainly appreciate the increase in the science, but in terms of the balance in making decisions for agricultural businesses, we want to emphasise that those changes need to be implemented in good measure with good visibility for all concerned and that firm governance processes are used.

Moving to the declaration of regional ecosystems: clauses 102, 103 and 104 remove the reference to the regulation as the mechanism by which an endangered, or of concern, or of least concern regional ecosystem is declared. This is quite a critical point. AgForce does not support these amendments and instead recommends that the government retain the declaration process in the regulation. Again, it comes back to the risks of rapid fire, short-term changes made by experts in the Herbarium that can have significant effects on business decisions for landholders which can involve large outlays of money that may, in due course, be proven to be, or deemed to be, illegal or not supported. A change that is made in a short time frame can be quite impactful. In order for a project to evolve, it can take a landholder some months or even some years to make decisions, so to have those decisions impacted in the short term by changes to mapping is quite a concern. We are keen to ensure that the decision-making around endangered, of concern and of least concern regional ecosystems also follows due process.

ACTING CHAIR: My question is regarding the proposed changes to the Land Act 1994 and Land Regulation 2020. I am interested in what you have talked about, certainly in terms of alternate tenure models which is a large, ongoing project. What we have now is working with government as well as traditional owners. Can you outline your role in that negotiation over alternate tenure arrangements and how you work with the traditional owners? It is something new that we have seen in Queensland, and I am interested to see how you interact with this three-cornered negotiation, if you like.

Mr Guerin: I will make some opening comments and either Nikki or Greg can join. It is a developing area for AgForce, and I can use a couple of specific examples. A little under two years ago, AgForce did some extensive consultation in the Lake Eyre Basin. The involvement and contribution of traditional owners alongside other parts of the community was enormously valuable in getting the broad consensus of opinion together in thinking about those landscapes. We very much encourage government, industry and different parts of the community to sit down and talk about some of these landscape challenges together, and we find we get enormous value from that. I would say, though, chair, it is an emerging and reasonably new area for us, as I think it is for the broader community, but examples and experiences like the Lake Eyre Basin tell us that it is absolutely the right thing to do, and that you get enormous value from doing so. I do not know whether Nikki or Greg have any other comments, but that is just an example that stands out to me, and it is an increasing part of our work.

Mr MILLAR: In relation to the Vegetation Management Act 1999, AgForce do not support the proposed changes to the regional ecosystem description database and the committee notes AgForce's comments that landholders and consultants want clear, stable guidelines and regulations

for vegetation management not be subjected to frequent changes in regional ecosystem descriptions from a conservation management database. Could AgForce please elaborate on their concerns regarding the proposed changes to the REDD?

Mr Guerin: I will do this two ways. Greg has done many years of deep work and leads us on our behalf, so I will defer to Greg. I will start with a personal story because from my short time in Queensland, the personal stories in the community tell me that the hurt and unintended consequences for the community can be large.

Back when version 7 of the trigger mapping was released, there was a young woman in Central Queensland who had just spent \$11 million buying a property, largely with debt, but with support from family, and had done it partly on the back of a PMAV which was in place which described Category X over most of the land and therefore she and her family could see her way through to a cash flow on a farming operation that could pay that debt back. Version 7 of the trigger mapping put a blue dot, as it is called, across most of that land and gave her a negative equity position and the bank would have called her up if we had not had it reversed.

So 7.1 and 7.2 in rapid succession after that, following conversations with the environment minister at the time saved that farm and that challenge. However, the emotional hurt for that family, the concern that will always sit with them, is very hard to describe. That long-term confidence and planning and working deliberately through phases is really important, as Greg touched on. AgForce and members are very keen to ensure we build better environmental outcomes and that as we get better science, we use that. As the satellite imagery gets better, we consider that. We apply ground truth where we do not know. We are very keen on all of that. We are very keen to do it in a deliberate way so that we do not get these shocks overnight and we work together on it. That is one human story that came out of the trigger mapping in the last couple of years.

Mr Leach: The ongoing farm business management aspects of investment, relationships with banks, debts, so on and so forth, requires some stability, as we would all expect, in terms of decision-making. When it comes to investments and required investments for management of landscapes, when we look at some of the complexities that can occur—and there are numerous examples I could cite, but I will not take too much time today—where landholders have invested a considerable amount of time to develop projects of clearing regrowth or managing landscapes on their properties that may or may not have been locked in under a property map of accessible vegetation, those requirements by the banks to have certainty when these developments can take place and where they can take place and the likely return on those investments, are very significant in terms of the sustainability of those enterprises. To have certainty going forward is paramount. When it can mean the difference between a landholder obtaining finance or not, for some planned actions going ahead, which can largely hinge on a database that is changing rapidly, that jeopardises the business stability of those investments.

Mr WALKER: Do you have any more details about what AgForce would like to see with term lease tenure reform? Does AgForce have a position on what the requirements for term lease conversion to perpetual or freehold should be?

Mr Guerin: There is an enormous amount in that in what we would like to see and we are happy to take on notice a lot more material to bring through for the conversation. In short form, I suppose, by way of a high-level statement, it is a little bit like what we have talked about with the VMA changes as a structured, considerate and certain pathway to walk through what are sometimes some very vexed issues but important conversations to have, with some certainty that taking a path will get to an outcome in a considered amount of time, and it is an outcome we can be confident we will get to, whatever that decision might be, and it is a process which has some time-bound nature to it.

For example, as the value of land goes up, freeholding land is a very interesting conversation to have with leasehold people because, to use an example at the moment, out in Boulia, the land revaluation is proposed over 300 per cent two months from now. When you start a freeholding process, that is the moment at which they determine the cost of that transfer. Starting a freeholding process, for example, out there before June this year is 300 per cent cheaper than starting a process after that. However what we are keen to see in the reform piece is some certainty about the process which might take years, but some certainty about the processes we go through, the considerations we need to think about, the traditional owner piece that the chair talked about before, some thinking about some certainty around process to get us through that. We have a lot of work on that, and more to do, but we are very keen to be working collaboratively with the government in that endeavour.

Mr WEIR: Your comments around those blue dots were interesting. Is that your concern with where this amendment could go to? Also, do you have concerns that it will impact on PMAVs?

Mr Leach: Yes, we do have concerns, as was mentioned earlier. In terms of business stability, in terms of business certainty and in terms of longer-term trajectories, we work with ecosystems that are decade or century time frames, and making very considered investments in those longer-term, slow-changing ecosystems requires certainty. We will come back to that again and again. Sorry, can I ask for the second part of your question again?

Mr WEIR: In respect of PMAVs, do you see that this could have any implication?

Mr Leach: For landholders who have gone through the PMAV process and have obtained a PMAV on their property, it provides a lot of certainty going forward. We have some considerable concerns about discussions of which we have been aware of some moves to change the PMAV instrument within the act, to perhaps introduce some more controls within that PMAV instrument; we are gravely concerned about that. If that was to change potentially in the act going forward, again that would be another cause of destabilisation of business certainty. Nothing is imminent from communications formally, but we are concerned about those potential changes coming, yes.

Mr WEIR: I take it you outright oppose this amendment in the legislation?

Mr Leach: In terms of the vegetation management, yes.

Mr MARTIN: I note that AgForce supports the proposed changes to the Stock Route Management Act. Is there any further comment or information you would like to provide the committee, and in particular something that we raised with the LGAQ in relation to further cost recovery, and whether you have any input into whether a different fee structure or alternative fee arrangements had been mentioned or considered by your members?

Miss Hoffmann: I refer the committee to our submission, to the review of the stock route management 2003 regulation. AgForce puts forward our position on a fee restructure in there, and we are of the opinion that the current fees charged for both static and travelling stock are grossly inadequate. We encourage core practices on the route, and we are supportive of an increase in those fee structures.

Mr MARTIN: My understanding is that it is currently made up of application fees and permit fees for travel or agistment. Are you saying that those three types of fees are enough; there is no new fee that is being considered?

Miss Hoffmann: No, but we are supportive of an increase in the fee for travelling stock.

Mr WEIR: Given your opposition to this amendment, were you involved in any consultation as to this proposed amendment to the Vegetation Management Act prior to this bill?

Mr Leach: In relation to this, no, I was not involved in consultation. However other AgForce staff were briefed on the bill.

Mr MILLAR: Given that you were not involved in the original proposal with the amendment, have you since taken up this issue with the minister and his ministerial office and the department about your concerns?

Mr Leach: As yet, no, but it would be a good thing to do.

ACTING CHAIR: It might be in the report in that case.

Mr MILLAR: Thank you, Mr Chair.

ACTING CHAIR: There being no further questions, I will conclude the hearing. There are no questions on notice. Thank you to our secretariat, to Hansard and to everyone who has participated today. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's web page in due course. I declare this public hearing closed, thank you.

The committee adjourned at 11.07 am.