

Question on Notice

No. 792

Asked on Wednesday, 16 June 2021

MRS D FRECKLINGTON ASKED THE MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE GREAT BARRIER REEF AND MINISTER FOR SCIENCE AND YOUTH AFFAIRS (HON M SCANLON)—

QUESTION:

With reference to the Reef Regulations and the commencement on 1 June 2021 of the new or expanding cropping and horticulture standard—

Will the Minister consider waiving the permit fees for producers in the South Burnett and western Gympie areas to address the negative mental health affects the regulations are having on primary producers and to offer an 'in good faith' incentive to producers to become engaged in the process?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for the question.

The Queensland Government has already waived the annual fee for growers who need a permit (i.e. an environmental authority) to undertake commercial cropping and horticulture in the Great Barrier Reef catchment on five hectares or more of land that has not been cropped before or not cropped recently.

The Government has also made the permit application process for new cropping on 100 hectares or less, or where banana cultivation is relocating due to the presence of Panama disease, cheaper, quicker and simpler. Where a grower can meet the outcomes-focused requirements in the environmentally relevant activity standard, they can make a standard application. A standard application does not require any supporting information, will be approved in less time and has a one-off standard application fee, which is \$215 less than the other application types.

In addition, in response to feedback, the Government amended the Environmental Protection Regulation 2019 to increase the scope of land considered to have a cropping history and therefore exempt from needing a permit for new cropping. This helps address growers' concerns that a permit may be required where land has not been cropped for more than five years due to drought, or where there are long fallow periods or spelling for some crop types (e.g. ginger).

Growers do not need a permit to continue cropping on existing cropping land (i.e. land that has been cropped in at least three of the last 10 years).

By requiring growers to design, set up and maintain new cropping areas to minimise nutrient and sediment runoff that can harm the Great Barrier Reef, the permit enables agriculture to expand without any detriment to Reef water quality.

If growers are facing financial hardship, they are encouraged to contact the Department of Environment and Science to discuss payment plan options.