QUEENSLAND FARMERS' FEDERATION

Mineral Resources and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2026

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This submission is provided to:

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Submitted via online portal.

Our members

- Queensland Fruit & Vegetable Growers
- Cotton Australia
- CANEGROWERS
- Greenlife Industry QLD
- eastAUSmilk
- Timber Queensland
- Queensland United Egg Producers
- Turf Queensland
- Pork Queensland
- Australian Chicken Meat Federation
- Bundaberg Regional Irrigators Group
- Burdekin River Irrigation Area
- Central Downs Irrigators Ltd
- Fairburn Irrigation Network
- Mallawa Irrigation
- Pioneer Valley Water Co-operative Ltd
- Theodore Water Pty Ltd
- Eton Irrigation
- Lockyer Valley Water Users

About the Queensland Farmers' Federation

The Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) is the united voice of agriculture in Queensland.

Our members are agricultural peak bodies who collectively represent more than 13,000 farmers who produce food, fibre and foliage across the state.

QFF's peak body members come together to develop policy and lead projects on the key issues that are important to their farmer members and the Queensland agriculture sector.

Together, we form a strong, unified voice leveraging our effectiveness by working together to drive policy and initiatives that support a strong future for Queensland agriculture.

Introduction

The Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the *Mineral Resources and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2026*, referred to the Committee on 15 September 2026. QFF does not support the Bill in its current form.

Queensland is rightly seeking to enable major development that supports economic growth, regional jobs and the state's sovereign priorities. QFF's concern is that, as approval pathways are streamlined for large and emerging industries, the same level of strategic importance must also be afforded to agriculture, agricultural land and water resources.

Agriculture is not simply another stakeholder in these processes; it is a foundational industry, critical to food and fibre production, regional economies and Queensland's long-term resilience. Recent reform proposals, including those affecting the operation of the *Regional Planning Interests Act 2014*, highlight the need to ensure that efficiency is balanced with genuine, early and meaningful engagement with landholders and the agricultural sector.

In this context, safeguards for agriculture are increasingly being characterised as 'red tape'. QFF is concerned that the cumulative effect may shift the regulatory framework away from protecting agricultural land and water resources and towards facilitating development. We remain committed to working constructively with government to ensure that reforms improve efficiency while maintaining appropriate protections for agriculture. The Bill should therefore be considered as part of this broader pattern of reform.

QFF supports reform that genuinely improves the efficiency and timeliness of resource approvals and does not defend duplication or process for its own sake. QFF also acknowledges that some elements of the Bill, including the consolidation of notification processes, may reduce genuine duplication. Our concern is how efficiency has been pursued: by narrowing who may participate, and by removing the independent check that has, in practice, protected agricultural land and water.

QFF's concerns centre principally on two amendment elements:

1. The 125 km limit on objection standing.
2. The replacement of automatic Land Court referral with a discretionary Ministerial referral.

Neither element reflects, and in parts contrasts with, the Queensland Law Reform Commission's review of mining lease objections.

Submission

Limiting objection standing to a 125 km eligibility zone

Standing to object should follow the likelihood of being affected, not a fixed distance from a lease boundary. The Bill (cl 41, new s 260(6)) limits eligible entities to affected persons, occupiers of the lease area, and owners or occupiers of land within a '125km eligibility zone'.

As a result, a landholder whose bore, aquifer or watercourse is genuinely affected may be excluded simply because they sit beyond 125 km. A water-entitlement holder without land in the zone is excluded regardless of where their entitlement sits. Because the 125 km figure has not been shown to correspond with the reach of a mine's environmental, land or water impacts, it may remove an existing objection right from people who can demonstrate that they are affected.

The Department has explained that the 125 km figure is intended to provide consistency with the *Strong and Sustainable Resource Communities Act 2017* (SSRC Act). That Act defines a 'nearby regional community' by a 125 km radius from a project's main access. While QFF understands the objective of regulatory consistency, the analogy does not provide an appropriate basis for determining who may be affected by land and water impacts.

The SSRC Act addresses social and economic impacts, such as employment, housing and community wellbeing, which radiate to the towns where a workforce lives and spends. In effect, it describes a labour-market catchment.

Objection rights under this Bill concern a different kind of impact. Land and water impacts follow hydrology and geology, not commuting distance. The analogy is also incomplete. The SSRC Act lets the Coordinator-General set a greater or lesser radius case by case. The Bill adopts the fixed number, measured from the lease boundary, without that flexibility.

QFF considers connectivity to be the appropriate test. Groundwater and surface-water impacts travel along aquifers, faults and catchments, so the reach of an impact depends on the hydrogeology of a site rather than its distance from a lease boundary.

The relevance of groundwater connectivity is demonstrated by the Great Artesian Basin Water Resource Assessment, undertaken by CSIRO and Geoscience Australia for the Australian Government:[1]

The Great Artesian Basin Water Resource Assessment found that groundwater movement in the Basin is controlled by complex geological structures, including faults and ridges. It identified areas where the GAB aquifers may be connected to the geological basins beneath them and to shallow groundwater above. It also found that groundwater can move vertically between GAB formations more readily than had been understood.

QFF does not suggest the Assessment shows mining impacts travelling more than 125 km. It does show that groundwater connectivity is governed by geological structure. The issue is therefore not whether a particular mining impact has been demonstrated to extend beyond 125 km, but whether 125 km is an appropriate absolute boundary for determining who may be

affected. A fixed 125 km radius therefore cannot be treated as the scientific limit of groundwater connectivity or potential impact.

QFF therefore recommends that the eligibility test include a connectivity-based limb. A person outside the 125 km zone should be able to establish standing where they can demonstrate a credible hydrological or hydrogeological connection between their land, water supply or water entitlement and the area potentially affected by the proposed mining activity.

Replacing automatic Land Court referral with Ministerial discretion

QFF does not support removing automatic independent merits review without an equivalent safeguard in its place. The Land Court has been an integral forum in which a landholder can test a proponent's expert evidence on groundwater, subsidence, dust or water quality before an independent decision-maker.

Under the Bill (cl 44, amended s 271A(1)(c)), referral becomes a discretion held by the same authority that grants the approval. The department has confirmed there will be no statutory referral criteria. QFF considers that this approach does not provide sufficient transparency, certainty or independent scrutiny for affected parties.

Moreover, s 4(3)(a) of the *Legislative Standards Act 1992* requires that rights depend on administrative power only where that power is sufficiently defined and subject to appropriate review.

The explanatory notes concede that the referral powers under s 271A(1)(c) of the Mineral Resources Act and s 186(1)(c) of the Environmental Protection Act prescribe no specific criteria for referral, and that this could be perceived as making an objector's right to be heard depend on an insufficiently defined power.

We note two further concerns:

- The notes point to s 271 (MR Act) and s 187 (EP Act) as the basis for the decision. Yet those criteria apply to the whole decision to grant, refuse or refer, and new s 271(4) requires the Minister to consider them only 'to the extent the Minister considers necessary'.
- General administrative law and s 58 of the *Human Rights Act 2019* support judicial review of whether a decision was lawfully made, not merits review of whether it was right. With no criteria to measure against, even judicial review has little to hold on to.

QFF therefore recommends the Bill retain a genuine independent merits-review pathway. At minimum it should:

1. Set published, reviewable referral criteria, with a presumption of referral for objections concerning groundwater, prime agricultural land and restricted-land conflicts.
2. Give eligible objectors a right to seek referral.
3. Require written reasons where referral is refused.

Related elements

Environmental matters confined to the EA process

QFF accepts that genuine duplication should be removed and acknowledges the Department's advice that environmental impacts will continue to be assessed under the EP Act, with no change to the scope of that assessment. QFF's concern is therefore not simply whether environmental matters remain capable of consideration, but whether affected landholders retain an effective opportunity to raise, test and independently challenge the evidence on which those matters are determined.

Confining environmental and water matters to the EA process while EA objection rights are also narrowed may reduce the procedural avenues available to affected landholders, rather than simply remove duplication.

QFF seeks assurance that no substantive consideration of agricultural land and water is lost in the transfer and that affected landholders retain an effective means of testing material environmental evidence.

Lower-risk EA applications

QFF does not oppose removing notification for genuinely standardised applications, provided the ERA standards adequately capture agricultural, soil and groundwater risk and a public online register is maintained.

QFF does not support automatic approval of standard EA applications associated with mining leases under new ss 226AB and 241A without human, site-specific assessment where agricultural land, soil or groundwater risks may not be adequately addressed by the prescribed eligibility criteria and standard conditions.

Submissions in place of objections

A submission carries less weight, cannot reach the Land Court and need only be considered at the decision-maker's discretion. For these reasons, it does not provide an adequate substitute for objection rights. If standing and independent review are restored as recommended above, reliance on this fallback mechanism largely falls away.

Conclusion

The Government can achieve faster, more efficient assessment without diminishing landholder rights or the protections afforded to agricultural land and water.

Reforms to reduce regulatory burden should target genuine duplication and administrative inefficiency, not the safeguards that let agriculture participate in decisions affecting its future. QFF urges the Committee to recommend that the Bill not be passed in its current form unless elements (a) and (b) are amended as set out above.

Yours sincerely

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