



QUEENSLAND FARMERS' FEDERATION

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Submission

10 July 2017

Committee Secretary
Agriculture and Environment Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Via email: aec@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Nature Conservation (Special Wildlife Reserve) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2017

The Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) is the united voice of intensive agriculture in Queensland. It is a federation that represents the interests of peak state and national agriculture industry organisations, which in turn collectively represent more than 13,000 primary producers across the state. QFF engages in a broad range of economic, social, environmental and regional issues of strategic importance to the productivity, sustainability and growth of the agricultural sector. QFF's mission is to secure a strong and sustainable future for Queensland primary producers by representing the common interests of our member organisations:

- CANEGROWERS
- Cotton Australia
- Growcom
- Nursery & Garden Industry Queensland
- Queensland Chicken Growers Association
- Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation
- Burdekin River Irrigation Area Irrigators
- Central Downs Irrigators Ltd
- Bundaberg Regional Irrigators Group
- Flower Association
- Pioneer Valley Water Cooperative Ltd
- Pork Queensland Inc.
- Queensland Chicken Meat Council
- Queensland United Egg Producers.

QFF welcomes the opportunity to provide comment to the Agriculture and Environment Committee on the Queensland Treasury on the 'Nature Conservation (Special Wildlife Reserve) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2017' (the Bill).

QFF understands that the objective of the Special Wildlife Reserves (SWRs) is to increase the protection available to areas of rich biodiversity. Creating a new class of privately owned or managed protected

The united voice of intensive agriculture



areas, that are protected from 'incompatible land uses', will increase Queensland's contributions to the National Reserve System.

On 3 April 2017, QFF provided a written response to the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection on the draft Bill. QFF highlighted several concerns and asked for further information on these concerns before the department finalised the Bill. QFF did not receive further correspondence from the department on the Bill and, as it stands, still has some concerns about the Bill.

QFF provides this submission without prejudice to any additional submission provided by our members or individual farmers.

Background

QFF agrees that landholders have a role in ensuring Queensland biodiversity is protected. QFF and members have previously supported a need for sustainable land management across Queensland, and have been promoting industry-led best management practice (BMP) programs as an appropriate tool for the sustainable and responsible management of agricultural land. SWRs, as entirely voluntary declarations, plan to increase protection of high conservation land. Management of SWRs will be legally binding and 'run with the land', allowing these agreements to survive tenure change.

The SWRs may, as the government suggests, create an incentive for private investment, particularly investment from conservation organisations. What is currently not captured is the level of investment by farmers. QFF understands that these are often significant but understated investments. Additionally, the government's current policy platforms around a carbon economy, another driver for potential investments in SWRs, are not developed enough to deliver on these potential outcomes.

For many years, New South Wales landholders have played a role in formally protecting and conserving unique natural and cultural heritage on their properties through Conservation Agreements. Administered by the Office of Environment and Heritage, landholders with a Conservation Agreement may access benefits which recognise their commitment to conservation including: land rate exemptions, land tax concessions and income tax concessions. To increase the uptake and subsequent benefit of SWRs the Government should consider and price out these options.

Concerns

QFF and members have previously raised concerns about some aspects of the Bill, which remain unaddressed.

Land values

The Bill is restricted to Queensland. It is not uniform or complementary to Commonwealth or other state legislation. Due to this, there is a lack of understanding of the effects a legally binding, perpetual conservation agreement and associated management program could have on land value.

Land value, and farm business equity tied to the land are two vitally important aspects of property ownership. If SWRs inadvertently decreased the value of land, this will be a major concern for farmers.

The somewhat restrictive nature of the agreement between the government and the landholder will be considered when a property is sold. It is therefore appropriate for the government to investigate the likely impacts of a perpetual conservation agreement at the time of sale and any ongoing liabilities associated with it on land values.

Restrictive land management practices

The conservation agreement program will detail the management criteria of SWRs. These will be authorising documents with a statutory basis that guide compliance actions. Management of SWRs will have flow on effects to the management of adjacent productive agricultural land. It is therefore essential that restrictive management practices imposed on SWRs do not negatively impact productive agricultural land and the overall management of the farming system.

For example, the management of pests and weeds on crown land have created ongoing issues for landholders that abut these government-managed lands. The management practices used can be restrictive and frequently do not manage pests and weeds effectively. QFF members have highlighted the Feral Pig (*Sus scrofa*) as an example. This introduced invasive species is present in all sugarcane regions, although their predominant impact is distinct in northern Queensland. In Mackay, the Feral Pig has caused over \$1 million of damage to cane crops in recent years. A consistent and comprehensive approach is required to make a significant impact on the pig population. Where SWRs create corridors, a complimentary coordinated approach that manages these types of issues should also be funded and implemented.

The guiding framework for SWR management is therefore very important. While ensuring that biodiversity is maintained, and ideally improved; it must also ensure that management practices do not result in adjoining farmland or the farming system being adversely impacted.

Running with the land caveat

Currently, the proposed Bill ties SWRs to the title of the land. QFF is unaware of any developed steps to remove the SWR condition from the land/title or permanence of the SWR. The proposed Bill also does not detail the compliance requirements for SWRs. QFF considers that this must be clearly articulated so that landholders are completely informed when choosing to enter in to an agreement and alternatively, allow for a dispute process for adjoining landholders in the event the reserve is not being appropriately and/or responsibly managed. Additionally, clarification of the landholder's responsibility in the event the SWR is impacted or destroyed by a natural disturbance, such a bushfire, drought, diseases or requirements to establish fire breaks is needed.

Concluding comments

QFF agree that Queensland landholders have an important role in ensuring the state's biodiversity is protected. QFF considers it vitally important that agriculture and the protection of biodiversity function harmoniously and in perpetuity, as both are essential for the long-term prosperity of the state. The policy objectives of the Bill are sound, but several concerns remain and must be addressed before it progresses. Without clarity of the concerns raised in this submission, it is likely that there will be very limited uptake of this voluntary initiative.

Yours sincerely

Travis Tobin
Chief Executive Officer