



QUEENSLAND FARMERS' FEDERATION

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Submission

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Committee Secretary
State Development, Natural Resources and Agricultural Industry Development Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

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

Dear Committee

Re: Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018 – additional information

Further to QFF's submission to the Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018 (the Bill) on 22 March 2018, I provide additional information from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF), that was pending at the time of our submission, for the Committee's consideration.

- **Loss of prime agricultural land to other high quality agricultural land**

In our submission (under 'existing prime agricultural land not adequately protected') and at the Committee hearing on 23 March 2018, QFF recommended that the government not be allowed to make legislative changes to clearing provisions for prime agricultural land (i.e. HVA and IHVA) until it can be demonstrated that the current protections for this irreplaceable asset are adequate. QFF made the case that clearly the current planning framework does not satisfy this objective. (QFF has previously provided recommendations to government regarding an improved and simplified framework for the protection of agricultural land from development that would remove land from production or diminish the ability to use agricultural land for production.)

At the time of our submission, it was thought that the amount of Agricultural Land Class (ALC) Class A and B land that had been lost to non-agricultural development since 1999 was 104,000 hectares. DAF has since undertaken some analyses using publicly available data maintained by the Department of Environment and Science (DES) regarding this.

The state-wide ALC land class dataset was generated in 2013 for the Queensland Agricultural Land Audit. ALC Class A and B land is the best agricultural land in Queensland. It is limited in supply, and once lost, cannot be replaced.

Land use change datasets generated by DES under the Queensland Land Use Mapping Program (QLUMP) demonstrate that since 1999, 113,690 hectares – nearly 10,000 hectares more than previously thought – in this state have been subject to a change of land use from an agricultural use to an alternate use, which include, but are not limited to: manufacturing and industrial; services; utilities; and mining.

QLUMP started in 1999 and is 'point in time' data. It currently includes data from 2009, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015 and 2016 for selected Queensland catchments (the attached map for QLUMP data currency

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across Queensland refers). All of the land use spatial datasets are available through the Queensland Government Information Service (QSpatial).

While this more 'up-to-date' information provides a more 'accurate' picture of prime agricultural land use change, it also highlights that much hasn't been known and/or observed by government in developing policy positions. For example, after being requested to do this analysis by QFF, the government now knows that nearly 10,000 hectares more prime agricultural land has been lost to non-agricultural use than it previously thought.

Additionally, these regional/catchment assessments are not on a consistent time scale and are quite dated, meaning that there will have been considerable land use change in certain areas since they were assessed. Only 2 of the 13 NRM catchment areas – Burdekin and Desert Channels – are less than two years old (attached map refers). For example, there has been a substantial amount of prime agricultural land lost in the recent rush to large-scale solar facilities, which will not be captured in the QLUMP data.

In December 2016, QFF requested the then Department of Energy and Water Supply (DEWS) advise the solar footprint. In May 2017, DEWS advised 3,623ha out of the total 8,900ha (i.e. 41%) of land to be used for solar projects were on/potentially on Class A or B land. We know that more solar facilities have been approved since then and are still waiting for an updated solar footprint from the government. Conservatively, QFF estimates that at least 5,000 hectares of prime agricultural land has been lost to large-scale solar facilities alone in the past few years – none of which will be captured by the QLUMP data.

QFF reminds the Committee that since 2013 when the HVA and IHVA clearing provisions were introduced, only 5,608 hectares – about 0.0039 per cent of the area currently used for agriculture, and only 0.003 per cent of the land area of the state – have been approved to be cleared for IHVA purposes.

This is small-scale, responsible clearing for specific purposes that accommodates shifts in the agricultural footprint to combat climate change, realise better environmental outcomes, and increase farm flexibility and profitability. More than 76 per cent of these approvals were for 30 hectares or less. Many rural and regional communities rely on the considerable returns these high-value industries generate for their economic wellbeing. These irrigated agriculture industries provide relatively high direct and indirect employment for their small footprint – something that is much needed in regional Queensland.

Accordingly, QFF reaffirms our recommendations to the Committee that the:

1. the Bill be rejected outright
2. the government engage in an objective, transparent and evidence-based consultation process with all key stakeholders to realise a long-term, vegetation management framework that delivers triple bottom line sustainability for all Queenslanders.
3. an independent consultant be appointed to lead this consultation process and provide considered recommendations to government.

If the Committee decides not to reject the Bill outright and conduct a proper consultation process, QFF submits that that the Committee at least recommend to the Parliament that:

1. the clearing provision for IHVA, or the inclusion of a similar mechanism, be retained to allow vegetation clearing where there is a demonstrated economic and social outcome
2. the government greatly improves the level of information and statistics around land clearing, regrowth, and change in land use away from agricultural production to ensure a complete picture can be used to inform policies
3. a Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) process be undertaken given stakeholders have not been consulted on the proposed changes and the Bill will clearly have significant adverse impacts.



Yours sincerely

Travis Tobin
Chief Executive Officer

Encl.