



QUEENSLAND FARMERS' FEDERATION

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Submission

22 November 2019

Draft North Queensland Regional Plan Feedback
Department of State Development, Manufacturing, Infrastructure and Planning
PO Box 5666
TOWNSVILLE Q 4810

Via email: planNQ@dsdmip.qld.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Draft North Queensland Regional Plan and Draft Mapping

The Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) is the united voice of intensive, semi-intensive and irrigated 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 farmers 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 farmers by representing the common interests of our member organisations:

- CANEGROWERS
- Cotton Australia
- Growcom
- Nursery & Garden Industry Queensland (NGIQ)
- Queensland Chicken Growers Association (QCGA)
- Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation (QDO)
- Australian Cane Farmers Association (ACFA)
- Pork Queensland Inc.
- Queensland United Egg Producers (QUEP)
- Queensland Chicken Meat Council (QCMC)
- Bundaberg Regional Irrigators Group (BRIG)
- Burdekin River Irrigation Area Irrigators Ltd (BRIA)
- Central Downs Irrigators Ltd (CDIL)
- Fairbairn Irrigation Network Ltd
- Mallowa Irrigation Ltd
- Pioneer Valley Water Cooperative Ltd (PV Water)
- Theodore Water Pty Ltd.

The united voice of intensive, semi-intensive and irrigated agriculture



QFF welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the Draft North Queensland Regional Plan and Draft Mapping. We provide this submission without prejudice to any additional submission from our members or individual farmers.

QFF understands that the draft NQ Regional Plan is a 25-year strategic, statutory planning document for the local government areas of Burdekin, Charters Towers, Hinchinbrook, Palm Island and Townsville. It aims to support existing and emerging industries as well as in response to changes expected in the region over the next 25 years.

QFF welcomes the statement that the NQ Regional Plan (p.3) will seek to protect areas of high-value agricultural production from incompatible land uses and identify future suitable land supply for industry across the region to support new opportunities and economic development.

This submission discusses the critical items:

1. Areas of Regional Economic Significance

Include agricultural production and processing areas in the Areas of Regional Economic Significance.

2. Use of PAA to protect agricultural land.

The regional policy 1.1.2 for agriculture (p.40) and Table 4 (p.104) should be reworded to replace 'PAA' with 'ALC Class A and Class B land'.

3. Co-existence

Delete reference to co-existence for incompatible development on agricultural land.

4. Renewable Energy Investigation Area

Undertake detailed planning in the Renewable Energy Investigation Area in Burdekin Shire to avoid ALC Class A and Class B land.

5. Measures that matter

Change the measure for agricultural land to 'Increased area of agricultural production'.

6. Development assessment benchmarks

Develop improved assessment benchmarks that focus on local impacts and justification for proposed development rather than regional impacts.

1.0 Areas of Regional Economic Significance

The NQRP correctly identifies agriculture as one of the primary strengths of the regional economy. However, throughout the draft plan, agriculture is treated conceptually as separate from the other components of the regional economy. This is clear in the definition of Areas of Regional Economic Significance (Figures 7a and 7b) that include manufacturing, processing, defence, health and knowledge elements, but exclude agriculture. It is appropriate to distinguish agriculture as an extensive broadhectare industry from the more intensive location-specific industries. However, it is important conceptually that agriculture be included as a subset of the significant regional economic areas. The mapping should show the agriculture area as: Area of Regional Economic Significance – Agriculture.

2.0 Priority Agricultural Area

The Priority Agriculture Area (PAA) included in the NQRP (Map 1) is an arbitrary subset of the area of Class A and Class B (ALC) land with no stated criteria or justification for the chosen boundary. PAA is not recognized or defined by the Planning Act. The use of this arbitrary subset of agricultural land is contrary to the State Planning Policy that states clearly that:

(2) Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) Class A and Class B land is protected for sustainable agricultural use by:

(a) avoiding fragmentation of ALC Class A or Class B land into lot sizes inconsistent with the current or potential use of the land for agriculture

(b) avoiding development that will have an irreversible impact on, or adjacent to, ALC Class A or Class B land

(c) maintaining or enhancing land conditions and the biophysical resources underpinning ALC Class A or Class B land.¹

It is inappropriate and misleading to use the PAA designation as the basis for protecting agricultural land from both resource and other inappropriate development in the regional plan. Unfortunately, the Queensland Government has adopted different approaches for the protection of agricultural land from resource development under the *Regional Planning Interests Act* to that for the protection of agricultural land from development under the *Planning Act*. This has led to confusion and QFF has consistently urged the Queensland Government to resolve these different approaches. The box on page 39 states that the use of PAA and PALU in the NQRP is an attempt 'to achieve a consistent planning outcome'. While this intended outcome is supported by QFF, the use of PAA, which is an arbitrary subset of Class A and Class B, is not a satisfactory outcome.

If the proposed use of the PAA designation remains as the only agricultural land designation in the NQRP, this will further fragment and confuse the statewide approach to the protection of agricultural land and further emphasize the need for reform in this area.

Until an acceptable resolution of the various classifications of agricultural land is achieved and incorporated in the relevant policies, legislation and regulations, regional plans must include both approaches to the protection of agricultural land. The NQRP must follow the approach set out in the State Planning Policy that requires the protection of land designated in the Agricultural Land Classification (Class A and Class B) from development defined under the *Planning Act*, and separately include the protection of Priority Agricultural Areas and Strategic Cropping Areas from resource development under the RPIA.

The regional policy 1.1.2 for agriculture (p.40) and Table 4 (p.104) must be reworded to replace 'PAA' with 'ALC Class A and Class B land'. *Class A and B, SCA already identifies potential ag land, but the NQRP only protects PAA which is limited to existing use (PALU).*

QFF also notes that the PAA boundary is not based on the resource base but on land use. Hence it focuses only on existing land uses and ignores potential agricultural production areas based on the

¹ State Interest - Agriculture. State Planning Policy July 2017 p.30

quality of the land resource. An adequate regional planning policy must protect both current and potential agricultural land

3.0 Co-existence

In the box on page 39, the text states that ‘any incompatible use ... seeking to operate in these areas (PAA) must demonstrate that it can co-exist with the PALUs without affecting their current or future ability to operate’. The concept of co-existence was developed during the drafting of the RPIA in the context of temporary, short-term resource development (e.g. CSG) affecting small proportions of an agricultural enterprise. Consideration of the potential for co-existence has never been applied to the assessment of development defined in the *Planning Act* and is inappropriate in this context.

The application of principles and approaches from the RPIA to development under the Planning Act in the North Queensland Regional Plan is not appropriate. This particularly applies to the concept of coexistence between urban development and agriculture.

Development under the *Planning Act*, whether a reconfiguration of a lot or a material change of use is generally a permanent change and invariably results in the alienation of agricultural land. This reference to co-existence in this context should be removed from the NQRP.

4.0 Renewable Energy Investigation Areas

The Renewable Energy Investigation Area (REIA) on Map 2 (p.52) covers extensive areas of ALC Class A and Class B land in Burdekin Shire. QFF supports the expansion of renewable energy facilities in North Queensland, but not at the expense of resources identified for current and potential agricultural production. It is noted that the box on page 50 does not include agricultural land as a factor in determining the location of the investigation areas. It is recommended that the REIA in Burdekin Shire should be subject to a detailed planning process to determine appropriate locations for renewable energy facilities that avoid areas of existing or potential agricultural land unless an overriding need for the development in the public interest can be demonstrated.

5.0 Measures that matter

In Table 1, the relevant measure for agriculture is *EC5 Incompatible development on agricultural land*. However, the baseline is described as the *Total area used for broadacre cropping and intensive horticulture activities*. This baseline and the proposed measure are completely different metrics. A more accurate baseline for the proposed measure would be area data for every proposal for an incompatible land use or subdivision that is approved on ALC Class A or Class B land.

Alternatively, the measure should be changed to *EC5 Increased area of agricultural production* for which the proposed baseline would be appropriate and would also link to the implementation action concerning agricultural production in upper catchment areas.

6.0 Assessment benchmarks (Table 4)

QFF is a strong supporter of the regulatory provisions that control the development in the rural areas of SEQ and would support similar provisions in all regional plans. However, in the absence of regulatory provisions, the use of assessment benchmarks for development applications affecting agricultural land are supported as a means of achieving a consistent approach to development assessment in the NQRP area.

It is of concern that the proposed benchmarks have been drawn directly from the RPIA. These are applicable to resource development and require an assessment of the impact of a development proposal on a regional scale. The impacts of an individual development proposal at a regional scale are difficult to assess. Rather it is the cumulative impacts of many individual decisions (approvals) that may lead to a tipping point (sugar mill viability for example) that are of greatest concern.

It is preferred that the assessment benchmarks are written with an emphasis on the impacts on the site and local agricultural production. The benchmarks should also have a focus on whether there is a



community and economic need for the use and whether the locational requirements or environmental impacts of the proposal require it to be on agricultural land.

I look forward to continuing discussions with you and your team in the preparation of the revised NQRP to ensure that it meets the needs of the agricultural sector and related industries in the region. If you have any queries about this submission, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully

Dr Georgina Davis
Chief Executive Officer