



QUEENSLAND FARMERS' FEDERATION

Primary Producers House, Level 3, 183 North Quay, Brisbane QLD 4000
 PO Box 12009 George Street, Brisbane QLD 4003
 qfarmers@qff.org.au | (07) 3837 4720

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Research Director
 Agriculture and Environment Committee
 Parliament House
 BRISBANE QLD 4000

vminquiry@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Committee,

Re: Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016

QFF submits two recommendations to the Committee.

1. The Bill be rejected in its current form.
2. The Committee recommend to the government that they lead an open constructive consultation process on the Vegetation Management Bill.

Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) is the peak body representing and uniting 16 of Queensland's rural industry organisations who work on behalf of primary producers across the state and represents the interests of all farming sectors across Queensland. QFF's mission is to secure a sustainable future for Queensland primary producers within a favourable social, economic and political environment by representing the common interests of its member organisations. QFF's core business centres on resource security; water resources; environment and natural resources; industry development; economics; quarantine and trade.

Our goal is to secure a sustainable and profitable future for our members, as a core growth sector of the economy. Our members include:

- CANEGROWERS,
- Cotton Australia,
- Growcom,
- Nursery and Garden Industry Queensland,
- Queensland Aquaculture Industries Federation,
- Queensland Chicken Growers Association,
- Queensland Dairyfarmers Organisation,
- Queensland Chicken Meat Council,
- Queensland United Egg Producers,
- Flower Association of Queensland Inc.,
- Pork Queensland Inc.,
- Australian Organic,
- Pioneer Valley Water Co-operative Limited,
- Central Downs Irrigators Limited,
- Burdekin River Irrigation Area Limited, and
- Fitzroy Basin Food and Fibre.

The united voice of intensive agriculture



The government did not consult with the agricultural sector and key stakeholders before the Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 was tabled and as it stands, QFF asserts that the Queensland Government has not considered critical concerns from the sector.

Accordingly, QFF submits to the Committee that it recommends to the Queensland Parliament that the Bill be rejected outright.

QFF wishes to engage in a genuine discussion on vegetation management but does not believe there is a willingness by the major political parties and other key stakeholders to do so under the current circumstances. We therefore, call upon the Committee to recommend to the government that they lead open and constructive consultation on vegetation management to achieve a position that will lead to long term stability.

The Committee must understand that vegetation management is a critical issue for QFF and its members; the brevity of this submission is not an indicator of relative importance. This submission is short, because the issue is too important to be debated in an atmosphere of political theatre.

QFF has very real concerns about a number of aspects of this Bill, and the impact they will have on the rights of landholders and the opportunity to stimulate economic development and the growth of jobs in rural and regional Queensland.

QFF and its members concerns that relate particularly to the following areas including but not limited to;

- **Treatment of the High Value Agriculture (HVA) and High Value Irrigated Agriculture (HVIA) clearing permit provisions** - QFF considers that HVA and HVIA are legitimate reasons for precise and considered management of vegetation. The legislation as drafted, removes this purpose and therefore is fundamentally against our interests. Vegetation management needs to be undertaken through a thorough process that is robust and accountable to ensure clearing is justified.
QFF opposes the removal of the HVA and HVIA provisions for variety of reasons including;
 - Great Barrier Reef - Water Science Taskforce Report - Recommends the 'Voluntary retirement of marginal land from production'. This cannot occur without viable options to open up alternative and sustainable agricultural land to maintain agriculture as major contributor to the economy; this proposed amendment stops that opportunity.
 - Given the Governments recent decision to make in excess of 300 000 megalitres of additional irrigation water entitlements available and the focus on development in northern Australian, it does not make sense to deny the pathway for future agricultural development.
 - Urban development and resource industry expansion. The state's availability of highly productive land is decreasing, and HVA and HVIA provisions provide a highly regulated way of ensuring the sustainable development of new agricultural land. The ability of intensive agriculture to generate jobs, profit and boost economic activity is well documented.
- **Implications of Mistake of Fact Defence & Reverse Onus of Proof** - QFF and its members have undertaken a cursory review of the digital mapping which is currently an integral to the vegetation management framework in Queensland. It is clear that the quality of mapping is poor, and on this basis alone it would be in breach of the principles of natural justice to remove the "Mistake of Fact" defence, which could result in landholders prosecuted solely due to the inadequacy of the mapping. Additionally we are cautious about the *Reverse Onus of Proof* that has the potential to embroil farmers in legal proceeding at no fault of their own and no means to recover costs.

- **Category R** - QFF would like discussion relating to the definition of a waterway, opportunities from operating in a carbon economy, opportunities for ecosystem services and integrating scientific knowledge.
- **Transitional arrangements** - QFF has already seen examples of the Vegetation Management Bill impacting the movement from leasehold to freehold. This is unacceptable and results in unintended consequences for the long term sustainability of the agriculture sector.

QFF would like to emphasise that all of our members are willing to enter into discussions regarding vegetation management. We are of the view that the current framework forms a solid foundation for agriculture in Queensland. There are options to enhance the functionality and outcomes achieved under the current framework. The Government with this bill has proposed to remove the elements of the framework that are most important to our industries and leaves the choice to reject the legislation clear. If Government is serious about creating a sensible and sustainable vegetation management framework then this continued process of using vegetation management as policy wedge must end by building on the existing framework rather than starting a new.

Yours sincerely,



Ruth Wade
Chief Executive Officer

