

SUBMISSION TO:

Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018

SUBMISSION COVER SHEET

The closing date for written submissions is 12:00pm, Thursday 22 March 2018.

Please complete and submit this form with your submission to:

Email: sdnraidc@parliament.qld.gov.au

Post Committee Secretary

Fax: 07 3553 6699

State Development, Natural Resources
and Agricultural Industry Development
Committee

Parliament House George Street

Brisbane Qld 4000

Organisation or individual:	North Burnett Regional Council				
Principal contact:	Cr Robert Radel				
Position:	Councillor				
Telephone:	1300 696 272	Fax:	07 4161 1455		
Mobile:	0458 625 950				
Email address:	admin@northburnett.qld.gov.au				
Street address:	34-35 Capper Street				
Suburb/City:	Gayndah	State:	Qld	Postcode:	4621
Postal address:	PO Box 396				
Suburb/City:	Gayndah	State:	Qld	Postcode:	4625

Is all or part of your submission confidential? Yes, all Yes, part No

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Reason for confidentiality:

SUBMISSION

In providing this submission I refer directly to the key provisions of the legislation which may be amended.

1. Removing High Value Agriculture and Irrigated High Value Agriculture from the Vegetation Management Framework

The removal of High Value Agriculture (HVA) and irrigated HVA (IHVA) affects farmers in regions differently, with those in the north particularly hard hit.

The North Burnett Regional Council area is made up of a diverse array of agricultural industries and backgrounds. Beef production on a large scale, citrus, berries, dairy, viticulture, piggeries, saw mills and countless other agricultural ventures make up the majority of the economic and employment opportunities within the region. There is also a small amount of mining within the region, yet another industry that requires being able to clear vegetation to enable best business opportunities and practices and financial prosperity.

Previous tightening of the vegetation and regrowth management regulations has had long lasting effects on both individual and state wealth. This has been caused by decreased land values, inability to expand farming businesses, prevention of land use changes and inability to carry out routine management of regrowth and woody vegetation unsuitable for farming. The shortcomings and faults pointed out above must be considered when deliberating over the proposed amendments.

Removing HVA and IHVA will affect farmers across the state in a range of different ways, but none of them positive. Having the HVA and IHVA in place for the North Burnett, allows to a certain degree for the drought proofing and stabilization of production which assists in providing a consistent supply of high value crops. This in turn aids with the ever growing demand to be filled to supply international and Australian markets. The proposed changes allow for minimal increase in clearing allowed which will greatly inhibit and negatively impact agriculture as a whole across the state of Queensland. Given the agriculture has always and will always make up such a large percentage of Queensland's economy and employment opportunities, any move to restrict or inhibit growth in this sector seems counterproductive to say the least.

The North Burnett has a current population growth of 0% according to the statistics gathered by the most recent Census data – our region is an agricultural region. If government continues to make it harder than necessary for the agricultural industry to grow by introducing laws, that are not applicable across the entire state, ours like many other agricultural regions within the state will continue to decline.

Statistics – Council understands that the State Government can measure clearing of trees in a 16 day cycle, however currently – there is no means of measuring any form of regrowth. It doesn't make sense to introduce this legislation when you cannot measure the whole picture of vegetation management. Measuring the decline, does not give the State the full picture, therefore should not alone, determine an overall answer.

It is of our opinion that State Government does not have enough sustainable evidence to ensure that the changes to the Vegetation Management Act will not adversely affect the whole of Queensland.

2. Retaining Self-Assessable Codes

The Amendment Bill seeks to deliver on the Government's 2017 election commitments to protect remnant and high conservation value non-remnant vegetation; amend the accepted development vegetation clearing codes to ensure they are providing appropriate protections based on Queensland Herbarium advice; and align the definition of high value regrowth vegetation with the international definition of High Conservation Value.

Science-based self-assessable codes help farmers carry out the routine vegetation management practices necessary to sustainably produce food and fibre.

The self-assessable codes help farmers ensure trees and grass stay in balance, avoid soil erosion and feed animals in drought. Farmers are not required to obtain permits for work done under the self-assessable codes, but they are required to notify the Queensland Government.

Category R would be yet another amendment to the VMA that will adversely affect agriculture in the North Burnett and right throughout Queensland. Any moves to tighten or further impose restrictions on or around riparian areas and waterways is yet to have any solid proof provided that supports its necessity or value at all. Farmers take care of their land and in particular their waterways which in so many cases provide the base of their business. To allow those areas to become uncontrolled through tighter laws would only restrict good farming practices and has no proven benefit to the reef or any evidence to suggest that it would prevent erosion. In fact, it is commonly acknowledged that grass is a far more effective preventer of erosion and soil leaching than any of the woody species that may come through increased restrictions on clearing of woody vegetation.

3. Other matters relevant to the Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018 that the review committee should consider appropriate and worth some consideration

Are farmers, graziers and landholders in general the environmental vandals they are made out to be by the government and environmental activist groups of today? Should restrictive vegetation management laws be tightened even further to make it even harder for them to not simply survive, but to prosper and grow their businesses? Will further tightening of these vegetation laws help increase the productivity and prosperity of this great State, as we move into a time of growing population, growing demand for high quality beef, citrus, fruit and vegetables etc. and a seemingly unquenchable demand for export quality produce grown right here in Queensland? The answer to all of these questions is No. Not now, not ever.

If the government of the day were to work with landholders at times and places of proposed clearing, the farmer would have a clearer understanding of the act and the need for increased penalties would be avoided. It would seem that increasing government ability to access and prosecute farmers and enforce larger financial penalties *seem like an underwhelming solution to the primary issue at hand*. Many studies have shown that the size of the penalty has minimal effect as a deterrent.

The proposed changes to the Vegetation Management Act (VMA) will do nothing to enhance individual or state wealth, will reduce the ability to pursue new agricultural opportunities and

generally make growing food for our nation and international markets even harder than it is today.

Sustainable farming is a term that is thrown around and seems to be on the tips of everybody's tongue, but what does that actually mean? There are thousands of farmers across Queensland who work tirelessly on their properties 365 days a year to try and ensure that they have made enough to keep their doors open for business and hopefully build a business that one day their children will want to come home and take over. If farmers are not practicing sustainable farming, then their future and their hopes of a generational business are all but dead. Why would any person deliberately and knowingly destroy their own business through improper and reckless vegetation management?

The proposed new vegetation management laws are a further unnecessary imposition that would be placed on landholders, making their already difficult and often barely profitable farming business even harder and less profitable.

One of the biggest problems facing farming today, is the fact that they aren't making any more land... What there is in land mass, is all that there will ever be! By restricting land clearing and sustainable vegetation management, the potential to feed not only our own people but those from all around the world is greatly reduced. Less or no increase in viable productive land through tightening of vegetation management will only see the Queensland economy stagnate and eventually shrivel until we are a state of entirely imported food.

If the government were to invest in properly thought out water infrastructure to provide irrigation water to fertile agricultural lands through the state, the need for land clearing would be greatly reduced as the same or greater volume of produce could be farmed more efficiently in smaller areas. Not only would this further enhance more sustainable farming practices, but it would create jobs and wealth for the state, whilst reducing the need for further land clearing so hence achieving the same desired outcome as the proposed vegetation management laws.

It is widely acknowledged that in all industries and walks of life there are people who do the wrong thing and do not follow the rules, but we do not see entire populations punished for their actions. When a drink driver is caught, he is penalized for his actions....we do not see everyone lose their license and all punished for his indiscretion.

You won't find a Primary Producer who disagrees with the need for sustainable vegetation management and you won't find a Queenslander who doesn't like to eat. Agriculture is the fastest growing industry in the country and Queensland is now the number one agricultural state in Australia. Harsh and unnecessary vegetation management restrictions put that at risk. For Queensland agriculture to maintain the number one status in the country and continue for agriculture to reach its full potential within the North Burnett and entire state of Queensland, we need governments to adopt balanced policy settings that help us move forward, not propel us backwards.

Signed:	<i>R. Abdel</i>
Address:	
Date:	<i>22-03-2018</i>