



AgForce Queensland 'Healthy Environment, Healthy Agriculture' Policy Proposal



- Fair and balanced laws to grow agriculture and protect the environment -

Issue

Since its introduction in 1999, the Vegetation Management Act has been amended 38 times, which has confused and frustrated landholders, provided no long-term certainty for farm businesses and eroded trust in government.

Harsh and unnecessary regulations have placed significant financial burdens on Queensland farmers, led to perverse environmental outcomes, stifled regional development and restricted productivity improvements. Further, the changes proposed to vegetation management laws last year, if passed, would have denied farmers natural justice by reversing the onus of proof and removing the 'mistake of fact' defence.

That would mean farmers are presumed guilty and have to prove their innocence, and that farmers cop the blame if mapping the Queensland Government has produced is inaccurate.

AgForce members are sick and tired of vegetation management being treated like a political football, and are seeking a bi-partisan approach on this issue that stands the test of time.

Solution

AgForce's 'Healthy Environment, Healthy Agriculture' policy aims to drive sustainable agricultural production and deliver good environmental outcomes for Queensland without strangling farmers in red tape.

An outcomes focussed, landscape scale approach to vegetation management

AgForce is seeking a simpler, outcome focussed, landscape scale approach to vegetation management, with plans negotiated between the landholder and the State Government to achieve sustainable, defined environmental and primary production outcomes.

The central plank is a 'Baseline Area Management Plan, which would define the outcome of the vegetation management activity prior to implementation.

It would incorporate two components from the existing vegetation management framework:

- A Property Map of Assessable Vegetation (PMAV) which is based on historical or contemporary evidence-based data, such as explorer and early settler diaries, photographs and satellite imagery; and
- An Area Management Plan (AMP) that sets out how vegetation management activity will occur.

This approach would provide greater certainty to land managers who would be able to manage their land to achieve an acceptable environmental outcome while still maintaining their property's productivity and profitability.

For Government, it means vegetation management activities are known, better defined and documented, and easily monitored.

Further, if negotiations are conducted in good faith, a growing sense of trust can develop between the landholder and the Queensland Government.

With trust comes greater confidence, long term planning certainty, reduced government administration costs, and better economic and environmental outcomes for Queensland.

A more certain, staged approach to high value agriculture development

AgForce maintains that high value agriculture and irrigated high value agriculture developments present a much needed social and economic opportunity for Queensland.

With only four of 21 applications approved in the last two years, AgForce also seeks clear criteria and processes for applicants to work with, and an appropriate right of appeal if permits are not issued despite criteria being met.

We also want regulations amended to include a staged approach for applicants to successfully 'prove up' each stage of large scale developments (greater than 5000 hectares) before proceeding.

Proving means that the landowner can demonstrate an effective outcome through each phase of clearing vegetation, cultivating and planting.

Extension workshops for landholders

AgForce is also calling on government to fund extension workshops for landholders to refresh their knowledge and understanding of their rights and responsibilities under the vegetation management framework.

