



Vegetation management in Queensland

Eight Fast Facts

1. ■ Farmers manage vegetation to sustainably produce food and fibre.

Farmers manage vegetation and clear land to grow pasture for cattle and sheep to eat, and to plant crops such as sorghum, sugar cane, and a range of fruit and vegetables.

If we are to meet growing demand from consumers here in Australia and overseas for our high-quality food and fibre - and create more jobs in agriculture, farmers need to be able to manage vegetation on their land.

2. ■ Vegetation was cleared on just 0.23 per cent of Queensland's land area in 2015/16 - that's less than one quarter of one per cent. And that doesn't factor in how much vegetation grew during the same period.

Despite alarmist analogies about the number of football fields cleared, the Statewide Landcover and Trees Study puts the figure into context, revealing that just 0.23 per cent of Queensland's land area was cleared in 2015/16 (SLATS 20/15/16 report, page 21).

3. ■ Two-thirds of the vegetation management carried out on farmers' properties is to control regrowth and for routine farm maintenance.

Two thirds of the clearing occurring in Queensland is to manage areas that have previously been cleared and for routine vegetation management practices such as:

- Maintenance work - constructing fences, firebreaks and access tracks;
- Native forest practices - removal of high value timber for wood products such as furniture and houses;
- Thinning - selective removal of thickening trees to promote native grass growth;
- Encroachment - controlling the movement of trees and shrubs into naturally open grassland areas; and
- Removal of weeds, including non-native species.



4 ■ 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.

The codes are tightly regulated, regularly audited and approved by the Queensland Herbarium.

7 ■ The State Government has 'eyes in the sky' watching what farmers are doing, and the vast majority are doing the right thing.

The Department of Natural Resources monitors land use changes throughout Queensland via satellite every 16 days, and in 2016/17, there were just three prosecutions of illegal clearing. (Source: Brisbane Times, 23 January 2018)

5 ■ Farmers harvest mulga trees to feed cattle and sheep during drought, and to sustainably manage the landscape.

Mulga provides valuable feed for sheep and cattle, particularly during dry times. Cutting mulga branches and leaving them on the ground assists pasture recovery because it reduces water runoff and soil erosion.

Mulga is also managed so that it readily and sustainably regenerates, allowing landholders to better prepare for future droughts.

6 ■ The Queensland Government can measure vegetation clearing rates, but they do not know how to accurately measure how much vegetation has grown over the same period.

A Right to Information request by The Australian newspaper revealed the Queensland Government admitted its vegetation management data is flawed and only looks at half the picture.

The Statewide Land and Trees Cover Study examines the amount of woody vegetation removed, but not the amount of vegetation gained through regrowth, encroachment on to grasslands and thickening.

A Ministerial briefing note stated: "we have accurate information on losses, but not accurate information on gains." (The Australian, 22 May 2017, p 4)

8 ■ 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.

Australian agriculture was the largest contributor to national GDP growth in 2016-17, contributing 0.5 percentage points of national total 1.9 per cent growth. (Source: Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences)

In addition, Queensland edged out Victoria and New South Wales as the nation's most valuable agricultural state last year. (Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics Agricultural Census)

For Queensland agriculture to maintain our number one status and reach our full potential, we need governments to adopt balanced policy settings that help us move forward, not hold us back.