



BURNETT ENTERPRISES PTY LTD
ATF JS & JM BURNETT FAMILY TRUST T/AS
BENDEMEER PASTORAL COMPANY ACN 060789826

1st March 2010

SUBMISSION

Senate Committee inquiry

Native vegetation laws, Greenhouse Gas Abatement and Climate change

This submission is based on the Qld Vegetation management law as we believe it stands at present. This legislation has changed regularly and it continues to impact our business more heavily with each change.

Terms of Reference: 1. (a) - Diminution of land value and productivity

- We are 4th generation land managers in the prime agricultural area of Central Queensland, producing quality grass fed beef for both export and domestic consumption.
- Our family business has grown from a 1200 head beef cattle herd on 18,000 ha in the 1970's employing 4 full time employees to a 15,000 head beef cattle herd on 100,000 ha and employing 13 full time employees.
- This growth in our family business has been achieved by strategic development of our most valuable resource, the land. If the land and the vegetation that it supports are not maintained in an environmentally sustainable way there is no future for our family business, no future for agriculture in Queensland and therefore no future for Queensland.
- The erosion of property rights in Queensland, which started in the early 1990s, has created huge uncertainty in agricultural industries. Our three adult children, who were once very keen and excited about agriculture, are now wondering if there is any future for them in rural Queensland. The decimation of prime agricultural land in many parts of Central Queensland by mining interests, totally counterproductive environmental legislation, ever increasing cheap imports and market instability all threaten the viability of our agricultural sector at a time when the world is crying out for food and our state is in dire financial crisis. Why would any 25 year old be feeling positive about their future in Queensland's beef industry with the continual negative and detrimental legislation being produced by government?
- In August 1996 we upgraded the lease on our property to Freehold title. This process required us to pay more than \$300'000 to the state for the associated freehold rights plus an additional almost \$100'000 for commercial rights to the timber and vegetation present on this land. At that time we believed we had secured the future for our property allowing us to make long term plans on how to develop country sustainably. Since 1999 however these property rights as well as many others have been continuously stripped away with freehold title now providing little more security than leasehold land in present day Queensland.

- Since the Queensland government first introduced laws in 1999 to restrict vegetation management on rural land, our economic viability as beef producers has continually been challenged. Our land value is based on what it is able to produce. By restricting and reducing our ability to develop and manage our land, government is restricting our production. The trees and vegetation present on our property is continually growing, spreading and thickening so without continual management practices our productivity will decrease. Decreased productivity in turn reduces the capital value of our land. As a business, what future is there when you have invested in an asset which is continually decreasing in productivity and capital value? Landholder's frustrations are further exacerbated when we know as experienced land managers that government legislation has made the environment worse rather than better.
- Our estimate is that approximately 20% of our land area is affected by the most recent changes to vegetation legislation in Queensland. This will equate to a significant reduction in the value of the land as well as reducing the carrying capacity which will impact heavily on the future viability of our business as well as our employees and their families. We estimate that our carrying capacity will be reduced by 2,500 to 3,000 head over the next 10 years from this legislation. No business can plan for or survive with this imposition, **WITHOUT BEING COMPENSATED FOR THIS LOSS.**
- Mapping inaccuracies are a huge problem with current legislation: the vegetation in many of the areas has been responsibly controlled in the last 3 years; some areas are regrowth, which has been cleared and are in fact now labelled 'remnant vegetation'. All costs associated with rectifying problems with the government maps are borne entirely by the landholder.
- Imposing restrictive and unscientifically based regulations on the control of regrowth and woody weeds totally compromises the agricultural potential of this land so has no positive economic benefit to the state. Regulating for land to be 'locked up' and regrowth unmanaged will result in the land becoming far less productive within a ten year period. It also makes management practices such as mustering much more dangerous for employees and stockhorses.
- Current vegetation laws provide no positive ecological benefit to the state as a whole or to us as land managers. A healthy and sustainable ecosystem has variety and genetic difference. From our experience in land management we know that the Brigalow, Box and Gidyea regrowth protected by legislation will regrow in a thick monoculture devoid of ecological health and sustainability.
- Years of scientific research by QDPI, Stanbroke Pastoral Company and others clearly demonstrates the abundant life in the healthy soil ecosystems of the grasslands adjacent to the woodland areas, and the total lack of life in the soil of regrowth monocultures. Rather than protecting the environment, any laws restricting continual land management will result in forced degradation of the environment.
- Many years of research have determined that Queensland is more heavily timbered now than at any period since white settlement. Queensland has a land mass of 174 million hectares. 78% or 136 million hectares has been mapped as regional ecosystems. Of this mapped area 102 million hectares or 75% is classified as remnant. If every hectare of the state not yet mapped was non-remnant almost 60% of the state is already protected. The facts are that most of the unmapped area is remnant so the reality is that at least 75% of the state of Queensland is currently protected as remnant.

- The invasion of noxious weeds is a constant problem in all parts of Queensland. In our area part of our land management is to control the spread of Parthenium, Parkinsonia, Rubber Vine, Mother of Millions and Prickly Acacia. We are concerned that a great deal more of our time will be taken up with weed and pest management if the proposed areas are 'locked up' indefinitely.

Terms of Reference 1 (b) - Compensation arrangements

- As a result of the initial impact of the vegetation management restrictions in Queensland, we received an ex-gratia payment of \$100,000 in 2007. This was in no way accepted as compensation for the impact on our business, but was intended to offset the immediate impact of the legislation. **We have never been offered, nor agreed to any compensation for the impact this legislation will have on our business.**

We like most other rural producers in Queensland and Australia care deeply for our land. We are intrinsically linked to our land as we depend on it for our survival. We have to manage our land sustainably or we have no future on our land. Never before has managing the land in an environmentally, ecologically and economically sustainable way been so difficult. The reason is government interference and legislation which has stripped away land rights, created instability, insecurity, anger and frustration amongst primary producers and their families.

The vegetation management laws in Queensland have been introduced without any consultation with hands on, grass roots producers who have the most to gain and the most to lose from the outcomes. Unless radical changes are made to these laws and loss of property rights is reversed, the future of farming in Queensland will be gone.

We implore this senate committee to thoroughly and critically examine the huge injustice that the Queensland and Australian Governments have imposed on the environment and on the landholders who manage it for future generations. The current situation in Queensland is not workable, not sustainable, not good for the environment and not at all good for Queensland.

Sincerely

John and Jan Burnett

(Parents, Beef Producers, Directors: Burnett Enterprises Pty Ltd)