

I am a consultant. I have been involved in a lot of the large-scale applications up here. Not only that: I am an affected landholder. I am also involved with various groups, AgForce being one, and I am also involved in policy from an industry perspective. Many of you may remember me from my Natural Resources and DPI days. 14 ½ years in Government, 6 was in vegetation management, 3 as a soil conservation officer and the rest in extension and research, particularly around rangeland management. I remember the VM act in the early 2000's prior to the moratorium – balance was achieved between the environment and sustainable production back then. One of the solutions moving forward is to take a bioregional approach. I thought I would flag it here today. Going back to 2000-2003 there was a process called the regional veg management planning process. Some of you may recall that. We do not need to reinvent the wheel. A lot of that planning has taken place already, and it was good planning where consensus was reached between Landholders, scientists and environmental representatives. Then Beattie scrapped it and brought a total moratorium overnight.

Labor understands only too well that no other issue has proven so effective as harnessing the urban, green vote than demonising farmers over vegetation management. It is now happening at Federal level with Shorten promising he will end tree clearing nationally through the EPBC Act.

Farmers are custodians of their land... most are also Environmentalists; they want to leave their land in better condition than when they took over.

The laws we have currently, introduced under the previous Government, deliver fair balance. Policy settings can be adjusted by Governments – one Government may open the tap up – whilst another one can close it. They don't need to change the legislation – they can stop tree clearing through policy without going to the floor of Parliament – as we are seeing now.

This State legislation proposes to take that whole tap away!

Many indigenous and non-indigenous communities, particularly in the Cape and Gulf, aspire for Agricultural development to provide employment and opportunity in what is a low socio-economic area. These opportunities should not just be afforded to southern areas, that have had centuries of development. The biggest cause of environmental destruction is Poverty.

This is not about destruction of the environment... this is about sustainable agricultural production in a landscape planning approach... smaller discrete areas of better soils, like along River frontages, that are suitable in amongst large remnant landscapes. The CYPLUS one mapping done in the mid-90's mapped POTENTIAL Agricultural land in the Cape. There was an estimated 1.8M Ha suitable for sorghum and maize. There is a lot of red earth and heavier clay soils. Now I must emphasise POTENTIAL – this being subject to the codes and policies which protect essential habitat, waterways and wetlands and are written to prevent erosion. But let us put that in perspective: it would not be five per cent of the Cape. We have largely intact landscapes up here in North Queensland. The Cape is over 98% remnant, the Einasleigh Uplands, 96.5% remnant vegetation and the Gulf plains is higher than that again.

At the end of the day when we hear about a one-size-fits-all approach, it really comes back to we have not had a fair bite of the cherry over time.

To even qualify for assessment a Landholder needs to prepare a land suitability report and a financial viability report... the existing Law is a robust process.

Allowing clearing for improved pastures on less than 10% of a 'typical family block' of 25,000 Ha gives 25% increase in total gross margin, which includes amortising the cost of that clearing over 10 years. Using ABS data across our northern grazed woodlands, allowing up to a maximum of 10% clearing for grazing purposes, this represents an economic opportunity of at least \$300 million, or \$3 Billion across the next 10 years.

For High-value agriculture - even with a relatively low value crop like sorghum (assuming value at \$250/tonne), an extra 500,000Ha at a conservative average of 2T/Ha results in an extra \$250M per year. That can be multiplied 5X through the supply chain and is a huge boost to the economy.

The inclusion of High Value Regrowth (HVR) or "Category C" as an additional layer of regulation on leasehold, freehold and indigenous land. In particular smaller, closely settled-areas like the Tablelands and Wet tropics coast stand to be grossly affected by way of percentage area and smaller intense production areas that have been traditionally cleared. There are at least 22,000 hectares on the Tablelands that will be affected from basically from Walkamin through to about Ravenshoe, the Wet Tropics area. What we see there is just farming land that is meant to be reclaimed back. That is scary. In terms of overall economics, that is worth at least \$25 million at farm gate to the that economy and at least 5X that through the supply chain. Why is the mapping so wrong? Even looking at my own property, there is over 60 per cent of category C over that property, and some of that included around the house just three trees over former dairy night paddocks. It is clearly cleared country. I believe it comes down to ground truthing. I believe legislation has come at such a pace that even the public servants have not been afforded the opportunity to go and ground truth the country to see what is there. There is a lot of mistakes there, but that, in combination with the reverse onus of proof, really creates a very bad situation.

Again the issue of compensation arises with the recent auction of the Emissions Reduction Fund selling carbon abatement at \$12.25 per tonne. Where the recompense for Queensland farmers and what is the estimated dollar value of "High Value Regrowth"?

The Labor State Government has been 'cherry-picking' science. The fact is, even with the rise in annual clearing rates reported in the SLATS Report 2012-2014, we now have 437,000ha of more trees. This Government has chosen to ignore vegetation regrowth data from their own report to meet their own political end. The report shows that while 296,000ha were cleared, tree coverage increased almost twice the size of the ACT in just three years. In fact tree coverage increased in 51 of 77 council areas across Queensland. The fact is that trees grow, and right now they are regrowing at a much faster rate than they are being managed. It's like a lawn growing quicker than we can keep up with the mowing.

We can have Agricultural production and environment co-exist. We must move away from approaches that place economic and social development at loggerheads with the Environment. They are not diametrically opposed.

These laws are vindictive, punitive and perverse. They lower farmers, in the eyes of the law, to lower than a criminal, terrorists and paedophiles – who are afforded natural justice. They are perverse – they will not deliver the outcomes that Government believes. This move is bad for the environment and will ruin the productivity of our native rangelands through increased woody tree species. This will increase runoff and be bad for the reef through less groundcover. Science has demonstrated it is not trees that protect the reef – it is groundcover. This is a well-known soil conservation principle, outlined in the 2015 Soil Conservation Guidelines for Queensland

Often under trees there is less grass as trees stop sunlight and compete for nutrients, drop litter that stops grass growing and does not anchor the soil. Active growing crops like sugarcane, sorghum and maize sequester more carbon than old growth woodland. Agriculture is a solution to greenhouse gas emissions and renewable energy.

We need to maintain our current productivity – maintain pasture – control regrowth and control thickening woodland (which also threatens biodiversity and land condition).

How can the Government approve Coal mines, like Adani's Carmichael mine – which will be the biggest in the southern hemisphere – when they penalise farmers with punitive and vindictive laws? This does not grow the economy, produce food and renewable energy and certainly does not protect the reef. The Government wants the royalties from mining – it needs the money – but we must also produce food and fibre sustainably for the world. Not just be reliant on one industry. We have huge new markets, and demand for Australian food, particularly beef – into China, Vietnam, and Korea – and projected to grow over 1000%. How are we ever to grow our economy with laws like this?

This is more about dirty deals for Green preferences in inner-city seats like Miles' in Mt Coot-tha and Trad in South Brisbane who both rely on the roughly 20% in Green preferences. Let's not jeopardise a whole sector just to appease Goat-cheese eating Chardonnay hippies. This legislation is about kicking the can at farmers.