

MEDIA RELEASE

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Seeking vegetation resolution

By AgForce president John Cotter

There is an urgent need to resolve the uncertainty generated by the Labor Government's pre-election commitments as quickly as possible now that the new Ministry has been sworn in and Cabinet has met.

These commitments include a review of endangered regrowth clearing, about which AgForce made its position clear at a meeting with the Minister for Natural Resources Stephen Robertson last Friday.

AgForce's policy on regrowth remains concrete and immovable – the organisation opposes any changes to current exemptions which apply for regrowth and fodder harvesting.

Back in 2004, it was Minister Robertson who had carriage of the Vegetation Management and other Legislation Amendment Bill which introduced the current vegetation management regime.

At that time, the Minister assured industry this legislation would provide surety for producers to manage their land in a locally relevant and sustainable manner.

Minister Robertson said the development of regionally based codes “will provide guidance for vital vegetation management activities like thinning, encroachment, fodder harvesting and weed control”.

Hansard records Minister Robertson in Parliament saying: “This legislation is a historical line in the sand for how we, as a community, manage our often fragile landscapes and their natural limitations to ensure we remain economically and ecologically sustainable.”

Although this legislation was hugely contentious at the time, producers accepted this ‘line in the sand’, made appropriate adjustments to the way they run their food and fibre production systems in order to be compliant with the new rules.

But now the government is suggesting it wants to change those rules.

AgForce believes it is absolutely imperative that rural industry is not left to carry another burden of new restrictions on land management – this is unfair and unacceptable, particularly during the present global financial crisis when agriculture is one of the only bright spots in the Queensland economy.

Queensland has some of the best land managers and food producers in the world who have been recognised internationally for their sustainable production systems and high quality products.

At this time of global turmoil, it is unacceptable that a new layer of uncertainty is hanging over agricultural businesses when our sector has been acknowledged as productive, sustainable and a significant employer.

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A d v a n c i n g R u r a l Q u e e n s l a n d

AgForce is communicating to government that if the pre-election commitments about revisiting regulations on endangered regrowth clearing result in further restrictions of agricultural production, this will not only limit current production it will also curtail potential expansion of rural businesses with subsequent implications for rural and urban employment.

To use the central Queensland Brigalow belt as an example, agricultural land needs to be thinned of trees every 10-15 years to return to its optimum productive capacity. If the regrowth is left unchecked, production will be cut by 70 percent within 15 years thereby making the entire Brigalow belt unviable for future agricultural production.

The obvious downstream consequences of any new clamps on regrowth management would be job losses in the regions and in urban areas such as Bundamba where 3-4000 jobs depend on beef production.

AgForce believes it is short-sighted and irresponsible for any government to impose new changes that would rip the heart out of agriculture, one of the only cash cows left in the Queensland economy.

The government must not lose sight of the 4 to 1 multiplier supporting industries that flow from agricultural production and move swiftly to resolve the swirling uncertainty associated with its election commitments on endangered regrowth clearing and further Wild Rivers' declarations.

At AgForce meetings in Boulia this week, significant concern was voiced about the new Wild Rivers declarations for the Diamantina and Georgina rivers and Cooper Creek and these declarations are opposed by AgForce and affected landholders.