



## Cropping land framework still fails to answer questions

Peak broadacre group AgForce welcomes the release of the strategic cropping land policy framework as a step forward in safeguarding productive farming land and protecting the environment, but says there is a long way to go before the Queensland government actually succeeds in appropriately preserving the state's best cropping land.

AgForce policy director Drew Wagner said Queensland producers have been waiting for more than a year on the release of this framework, and during this time mining companies have accelerated projects to avoid the scrutiny of this legislation.

"AgForce is disappointed to see the government has sat on their hands for more than a year and allowed resource companies to push projects past tipping point, permanently alienating our best farming land," Mr Wagner said.

"The identification of 4.78 million hectares of Queensland cropping land as Strategic Cropping Protection Areas is a welcome measure to exclude projects that will permanently impact key farm land, but today's announcement was scant in detail.

"For example, the state government has outlined that Strategic Cropping Protection Areas will be free from permanent damage by development projects, except in limited exceptional circumstances.

"What are these exceptional circumstances? AgForce continues to stand firm that there are no circumstances exceptional enough and no project lucrative enough to allow for the permanent alienation of some of our nation's most productive cropping land."

Mr Wagner said there are still areas outside of these maps, and even within them, that may come under scrutiny as to whether they will be classified as strategic cropping land, and the state government has failed to identify who must bear the 'burden of proof'.

"AgForce continues to call for the onus to be on the resource companies to prove that the land they wish to access is not strategic cropping land. We must see permanent protection of this vital land, rather than mitigation of the possibility that it could be permanently compromised."

Mr Wagner said another loophole that must be addressed is if a resource development project is too 'well advanced' in the approvals process they will be recognised as a 'transitional project' and may be permitted to proceed on strategic cropping land, subject to requirements to minimise environmental impacts on that land.

"At this point the state government has failed to explain what stage the project must have met in the approvals process to be permitted to continue and this must be clarified."

Mr Wagner said AgForce was disappointed to see that coal seam gas (CSG) exploration and extraction was not included in this process because the state government did not identify the industry as having a permanent impact on cropping land.

"The truth is, the science is not there to say that the impacts CSG extraction, such as the effects on groundwater and aquifers, will not have a permanent impact on the productivity of our best farming land," Mr Wagner said.

"CSG and other extraction industries are experiencing exponential growth and they must be addressed in the Strategic Cropping Land framework if the state government want the legislation to have an appropriate impact.

"Protecting key agricultural land must go beyond simply obeying lines on maps and actually use science to ascertain what areas of Queensland's fertile cropping lands must be protected."

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