



Key Environmental Constraints Affecting Queensland Agriculture

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Table of Contents

1.0 Introduction	3
2.0 Spatial Extent of Regulation Affecting Agriculture	4
3.0 Explanation of Current and Future Regulation	5
3.1 Wild Rivers	5
3.2 Vegetation Management	5
3.3 World Heritage	6
3.4 Reef Regulations	6
3.5 National Park & Western Hardwoods	6
3.6 Leasehold Land	7
3.7 Beach to Border	7

1.0 Introduction

There are no more committed and practical environmental advocates than Queensland producers. These producers live and work on over 80% of Queensland and their livelihoods are reliant on the health and condition of the landscape. However Queensland producers are practical people. They are quick to implement change when they can see it will make a difference to the landscape. The tragedy is despite their uptake of technology and continued efforts to move towards best practice, political processes over the last few decades have historically been shaped by people in Brisbane who have a limited knowledge of the complexities in sustainably managing large areas and who have failed to consult with the stakeholders who do. Instead political players have introduced layer upon layer of overlapping, duplicative and complex regulatory systems that deliver dubious environment outcomes. In addition, these layers fail to consider each of the previous regulatory layers resulting in a confusing, complex web of codes, regulations and legislation that producers are forced to apply on-ground.

A number of recent events prompted AgForce to research the impact over-regulation has on the land area available for agriculture and the potential constraints that poses to Queensland's agricultural productivity.

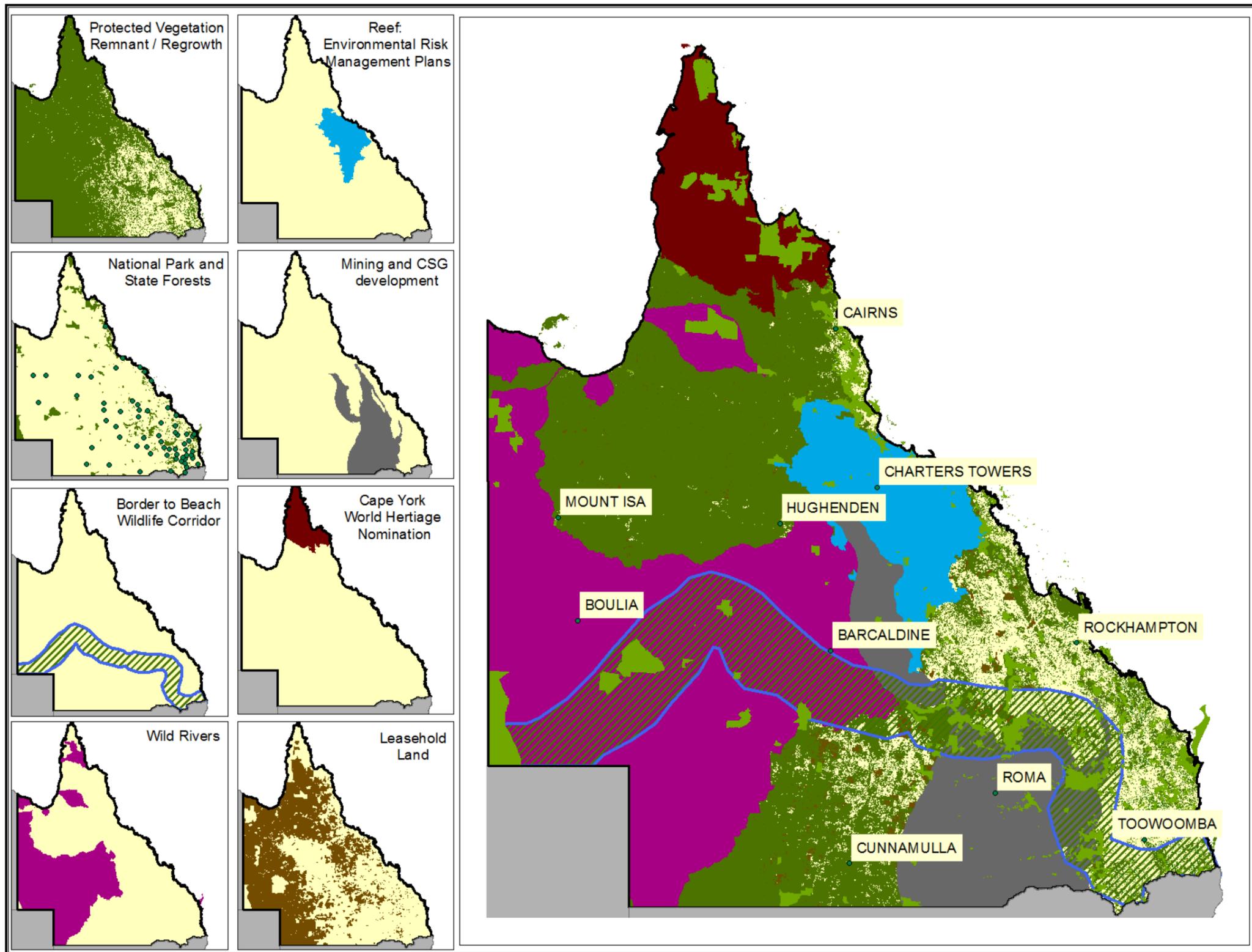
The recent announcement of the ALP's Border to the Beach Wildlife Corridor; a proposal to review the renewal process of rural leasehold land and ongoing plans to extend the area of "protected estate" by prohibiting the grazing of some State Forest areas are examples of potential constraints on the state's farm sector.

With these pressures and ALP¹ and LNP² policies that seek to double the food value chains and food production by 2020 and 2040 respectively, AgForce poses the question – where will our future food and fibre come from?

¹ *Food for a Growing Economy: An economic development framework for the Queensland Food Industry* (2011) Online 13.3.12 at <http://www.industry.qld.gov.au/key-industries/835.htm> This policy seeks to increase the Queensland food value chain from \$18.7 billion in 2008 to \$40 billion in 2020.

² The CanDo Agriculture Strategy (2012) Online 13.3.12 at <http://www.candoqld.com.au/policies/the-cando-lnp-agriculture-strategy>

2.0 Spatial Extent of Regulation Affecting Agriculture



3.0 Explanation of Current and Future Regulation

This section outlines the extent of regulation, its intended object and any plans to modify the affected area.

3.1 Wild Rivers

The *Wild Rivers Act 2004* puts in place an 81-page code for land managers along 12 already-declared wild rivers areas which have been identified as being ‘relatively untouched by development and therefore in near natural condition, with all, or almost all, of their natural values intact.’³ The Code requires landholders to implement separate land management regimes for different parts of the river which are classified into High Preservation Areas and Floodplain Management Areas which can stretch back many kilometres from the riverbanks. The Wild Rivers Code prohibits a range of future development activities such as aquaculture, many buildings, some dams and many types of vegetation management activities. This compromises the ability of future generations of farmers to effectively respond to emerging challenges, such as climate change, and fails to acknowledge that it is by the past efforts of landholders in these basins that the Rivers retain their natural values.

When it first proposed Wild Rivers legislation to the State government in 2004, the Wilderness Society publically called for 22 wild rivers to be declared.⁴ However the Bligh ALP government now plans to declare a further 8 river basins as Wild Rivers, all of them included in the Wilderness Society’s original plan.

Current extent of declared Wild Rivers: approximately 60,546,509 ha or 34.95% of State

3.2 Vegetation Management

Under the *Vegetation Management Act 1999* and associated regulations and codes Queensland landholders are responsible for the management of over 79% of Queensland’s protected vegetation⁵ which they must manage for the following outcomes:

- Conserving endangered, of concern and least concern regional bioregions as well as vegetation in declared areas;
- Avoidance of land degradation
- Preventing loss of biodiversity
- Managing ecological processes; and
- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions.⁶

Landholders must adhere to codes specific to their bioregion whenever they manage vegetation on their property, whether that be for fire management, to establish a fence or manage thickening of vegetation. Landholders do not receive additional monies for this even where production on their land is reduced by vegetation or where significant costs are incurred in managing it.

Current extent of protected vegetation: approximately 137,271,795 ha or 79.24% of Queensland

³ DERM Website (2012) Online 13.3.12 at <http://www.derm.qld.gov.au/wildrivers/>

⁴ The Wilderness Society (2012) Online 13.3.12 at <http://www.wilderness.org.au/images/qld-wild-rivers-map-550.jpg>

⁵ Defined as remnant and regrowth vegetation

⁶ s3(1) *Vegetation Management Act 1999*

3.3 World Heritage

Cape York is currently the basis of a World Heritage application which will be accepted if it meets one of more of the ten UNESCO criteria.⁷ The listing can apply to all types of land tenures including freehold, Aboriginal land and pastoral leases without the consent of the individual landholder.

The future of grazing, which has occurred sustainably in Cape York is unclear.⁸ While grazing continues to occur on some World Heritage Areas around the world, where it is seen to threaten World Heritage values, individual land management arrangements must be put in place. In addition, under a nomination any new activities, or any enlargement, expansion or intensification of grazing or other activities that are likely to have a significant impact on World Heritage values, would need to be referred to the Australian Government for assessment and approval.

Extent of proposed Heritage listing: approximately 16,604,510 ha or 9.58% of State

3.4 Reef Regulation

Queensland's Reef Protection legislation came into effect on January 1, 2010 to reduce the impact of farming and grazing activities on water quality entering the Great Barrier Reef.

Producers in the Wet Tropics, the Burdekin and Mackay/Whitsundays catchments now need to adhere to two additional regulatory requirements. The first is record keeping for certain residual herbicides and fertilised pastures (from 1 January 2010), for some graziers chemical accreditation (from 1 July, 2010) and the second requires landholders with grazing properties greater than 2000 hectares in the Burdekin Dry Tropics Catchment to establish Environmental Risk Management Plans (ERMPs) with annual reporting.

Current extent of area requiring ERMPs: approximately 14,130,772ha or 8.16% of State

3.5 National Park & Western Hardwoods

Since 2001, the national park estate has increased by more than 1.5 million hectares, spreading across more than 1,300 national parks, marine parks and other protected areas through the state. Much of this land was previously grazing land which is now excluded from these areas.

In March 2008, the Queensland Government made a political commitment to expand the national park network from 5% to 7.5% of the state's area by 2020 and to expand all protected areas to 20 million ha or 11.6 % of the state's land area by 2020.⁹ While some of this land will come from private conservation undertaken by landholders it is expected the majority will be sourced through forced acquisitions.

In a separate decision in 2004, the Queensland government committed to phasing out grazing on more than 1.2 million hectares of State Forest. Under this decision approximately 280 graziers will lose their grazing permits in a self-funded system which is still considered sustainable by many environmental groups. Graziers in this country provide environmental services such as feral pests and weeds management, fire management and land conservation – services that are often not provided on adjacent National Parks due to limited funding. Under the ALP Border to the Beach

⁷ UNESCO Online 13.3.12 at <http://whc.unesco.org/en/criteria>

⁸ DERM (2012) Online 13.3.12 at <http://www.derm.qld.gov.au/factsheets/pdf/environment/en13.pdf>

⁹ Conserving Natural and Cultural Heritage (2012). DERM. Online 13.3.12 at http://www.derm.qld.gov.au/parks_and_forests/managing_parks_and_forests/management_plans_and_strategies/pdf/master-plan/01-building-the-pas.pdf

policy, an estimated 400,000 hectares of this land will be declared as national park during the next term of government.¹⁰

Current extent of National Park and State Forest: approximately 11,900,372ha or 6.87% of State

3.6 Leasehold Land

Approximately 63% of Queensland's land area is rural leasehold land and the majority of leases are term leases granted for a set period of time. In 2007 after 10 years of negotiation, AgForce, the State Government and the Australian Rainforest Conservation Society formed an agreement for the renewal of term leases known as Delbessie and set up a range of processes to review its implementation and adapt to new and emerging science. Its aims are to support a productive primary industry and meet natural resource management challenges.

Five years later, Delbessie has received recognition¹¹ for its achievements and 232 on-ground land condition assessments have been completed. Over 85% of these have found land to be in good condition.¹² Despite this, political deals between green groups and governments are still occurring over this land in the absence of consultation or input of the key rural stakeholders.

In the 2011 Biodiversity Strategy released by Environment Minister Vicky Darling, a commitment was made to review Delbessie for biodiversity outcomes and establish a second, separate committee to provide the Minister with advice on Delbessie. This commitment is in contradiction to promises made by Ministers Darling and Jones who agreed that the current process and committee was doing a good job.

Current extent of leases requiring Land Condition Assessments: approximately 63,031,153 ha or 36.38% of State

3.7 Beach to Border Wildlife Corridor

On March 1, 2012 the ALP government announced its intention to create a 2,200km wildlife corridor stretching from Birdsville to the Gold Coast.¹³ While the corridor will utilise some existing national parks, it is likely that the majority will be dependent on private conservation and/or land acquisitions.

Proposed extent of wildlife corridor: approximately 29,153,810 ha or 16.83% of State

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¹⁰ Beach to Border Policy (2012) Queensland Labor Party. Online at <http://www.queenslandlabor.org/2012/03/01/border-to-the-beach/>

¹¹ Awarded 'Highly Commended' Premiers Excellence Award 2011

¹² Implementation Progress as at 29 February, 2012 (2012) Figures provided by DERM.

¹³ Beach to Border Policy (2012) Australian Labor Party. Online 13.3.12 at www.queenslandlabor.org/2012/03/01/border-to-the-beach/