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Wild Rivers – AgForce Policy

Update:

The intent of the Wild Rivers Act is to protect those rivers that still have their natural values intact. These values include hydrologic processes, geomorphic processes, riparian function, water quality and wildlife corridor functions. The legislation will curb new development, with existing development and use being preserved. The Act represents another conservation-based piece of legislation that gives no consideration to social or economic values. The Act is wide-reaching placing controls on development in the categories of forestry, vegetation management, overland flows, agriculture, animal husbandry dams, weirs and off-stream storages.

As at June 2010, there are 10 Wild Rivers Declarations in Queensland, these include:

- Archer River;
- Stewart River;
- Lockhart River;
- Fraser River;
- Gregory River;
- Hinchinbrook River;
- Morning Inlet River;
- Settlement River;
- Staaten River; and
- Wenlock Basin.

The State Government has made election commitments to nominate further Wild Rivers and in 2010 intends to declare Coopers Creek during its Water Resource Plan Review phase. Other rivers the government intends to nominate include the Diamantina and Georgina Rivers in the Lake Eyre Basin, as well as the Ducie, Watson, Olive, Pascoe and Jacky Jacky Rivers in the Cape. At the same time the Government has also announced that following the 2010 nominations, they also intend to nominate the Jardine, Holroyd, Coleman and Jeanie River basins for gazettal.

This potential increase in the number of rivers to be gazetted as Wild Rivers is of considerable concern given that the Code and Declarations:

- Fail to acknowledge Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) as part of the Act's purpose. This means that economic and social outcomes are ignored for the sake of a purely conservation-based Act.
- Restrict and regulate future water allocations and extractions.
- Prevent the introduction of exotic plant species for existing or new ponded pastures.
- Places restrictions on long-term development and future diversification.

Given that this is an area of ongoing concern to AgForce members, and in the wake of recent Government election commitments to pursue this policy, an emphasis on an industry-led sustainable policy approach is essential.

AgForce **opposes** the Wild Rivers legislation for the reasons outlined above, however AgForce:

- Supports and acknowledges a sustainable approach to riverine management, however does not endorse a regulatory-based framework;

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- Supports the development of management plans for future nominated Wild Rivers as an alternative to legislation;
- Supports a sustainable management approach that encompasses economic and social values, not just environmental values.”