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EPBC Reforms:

What's Changed, When it Starts, and What AgForce Is Doing

Dear Members,

The Federal Parliament has progressed the *Environment Protection Reform Bill 2025*, including amendments relating to vegetation management, clearing thresholds and “continuing use” exemptions in the *Environment Protections and Biodiversity Conversation Act 1999*. The Bill is expected to receive Royal Assent this week, meaning some provisions may take effect from the day after, with others implemented progressively through Commonwealth–State bilateral agreements during March–April 2026 or sooner if negotiated earlier.

Given the speed and uncertainty surrounding these reforms, AgForce is providing a factual update on what **may** affect Queensland producers.

Key Amendments Introduced This Week

Reef Catchment Clearing Restrictions

A new clause removes “continuing use” exemptions when clearing vegetation within 50 metres of a watercourse, wetland or drainage line within the Great Barrier Reef catchment, defined by a 2018, 1:100,000 dataset held by the Queensland Government. This **may** override certain Queensland exemptions for routine activities.

The 15-Year Rule

Land that has not been cleared for at least 15 years **may** require federal assessment and approval if clearing **may** significantly affect a Matter of National Environmental Significance (MNES). Forestry operations are excluded, but grazing, cane, cropping and mixed-farming systems are not.

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MNES – What This Means

MNES are the nationally protected species, habitats and places that activate federal oversight of land management. They include threatened species, ecological communities, migratory species, wetlands of international importance, national parks, world heritage areas, the Great

Barrier Reef and certain water resources. Given the prevalence of MNES across Queensland landscapes, many properties **may** be captured unless bilateral agreements provide clear safeguards.

What This **May** Mean for Producers

Operational guidelines have not yet been released, but under current drafting:

- Land not cleared for 15 years **may** require federal assessment if MNES are relevant.
- Routine activities within 50 metres of Reef catchment waterways **may** lose exemptions.
- Category X land and PMAV rights **may** face duplication or override unless protected through bilateral agreements.
- Producers **may** be expected to demonstrate MNES avoidance even for routine management such as fencing, regrowth control, firebreaks or pasture renovation.

We emphasise **may**, as these rules are still being negotiated.

AgForce Advocacy: Completed and Ongoing Submissions

AgForce has:

- Provided a Submission on the Environment Protection Reform Bill 2025, focused on protecting “continuing use”, PMAVs and Queensland’s vegetation management system.
- Evidence to the Senate Committee on 14 November, highlighting risks of retrospective regulation and uncertainty for producers.
- Ongoing engagement and meeting with the federal and state Agriculture, Environment and Resources Portfolios

AgForce are now preparing:

- Submission on proposed Matters of National Environmental Significance Standard.
- Submission on proposed Offset Standard.
- Submission to QLD Bioregional Planning Pilot
- A formal request and engagement plan for Queensland to defend PMAVs and the *Queensland Vegetation Management Act 1999* in bilateral negotiations.
- A suite of producer case studies demonstrating practical consequences of the Bill drafting.

We Need Case Studies from Members

To ensure your experiences shape national policy outcomes, AgForce is collecting confidential examples of how these reforms **may** affect your operations. If you have a relevant case such as MNES mapping issues, regrowth complexities, PMAV concerns or Reef catchment constraints, please email: fiskbeka@agforceqld.org.au or peterssonj@agforceqld.org.au. All information will be treated confidentially.

AgForce’s Position

AgForce continues to advocate that agriculture must **NOT** be treated the same as the mining sector, that “continuing use” must be protected in federal law, that PMAVs (especially Category X classifications) and Queensland’s vegetation management framework must be upheld, that inaccurate mapping must **NOT** determine compliance and that reforms must be practical, affordable and workable for family operations.

AgForce will continue to advocate at every level of government to ensure these reforms remain workable, grounded in evidence and aligned with the long-standing rights of Queensland producers. AgForce will continue to update members as further details emerge.

Yours Sincerely

Shane McCarthy
AgForce General President

Further links and Information

To understand what MNES or mapped features may exist on your property:

- MNES Search Tool (EPBC Act):
<https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/epbc/protecting-the-environment/mnes>
- Queensland Vegetation and PMAV Maps: <https://qldglobe.information.qld.gov.au/> and <https://www.resources.qld.gov.au/land/vegetation-management>
- Environment Protections and Biodiversity Conversation Act 1999:
- [Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 \(EPBC Act\) - DCCEEW](#)
- Reef Catchment Mapping (dataset: Great Barrier Reef catchment and river basins):
<https://qldspatial.information.qld.gov.au/catalogue/>
 - Note: AgForce is seeking urgent clarification on mapping accuracy and how outdated datasets will be handled.

Recent AgForce Media Releases

- [Canberra's Green Deal Could Leave Australia Hungry, Says AgForce.](#)
- [Farmers Can't Be Forgotten in the Rush for Environmental Reform.](#)
- [The Time to Stand Up for Agriculture's Future is Now.](#)
- [Queensland Producers Call for Common-Sense Environmental Reforms.](#)

Recent Industry Updates

- [Have Your Say on the Future of Environmental Regulation.](#)

Environment Protection Reform Bill 2025 and six adjoining bills links

- AgForce Submission [Environment Protection Reform Bill and six related bills](#)
 - [APH Environment Protection Reform Bill 2025 and six related bills Inquiry Page](#)
 - [Environment Protection and Biodiversity Reform Bill 2025 Amendments](#)
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