



## AgForce Queensland Farmers Limited

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MG/DM/GG006

Mandy Downes

Acting Executive Director, Conservation, Policy & Planning  
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Dear Mandy

### **Re: Targeted Consultation on Future Management of Lake Eyre Basin (Qld)**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the most effective protections for the Lake Eyre Basin (LEB).

AgForce Queensland Farmers Ltd (AgForce) members, broader industry and Lake Eyre Basin communities have grave concerns about actions taken by the Queensland Government to push through consultation on proposed regulatory changes through the 2019-20 Christmas vacation period to meet an election promise about the state's 'Pristine Rivers'.

By way of background, on 16th December 2019, Minister Enoch's Chief of Staff invited AgForce to participate in a briefing about a targeted consultation process to run until 24 January 2020 relating to the 'Pristine Rivers' in the Lake Eyre Basin. The decision not to consult directly with AgForce members, other landholders and stakeholders in the whole of the Lake Eyre Basin including the Georgina, Diamantina and Cooper Catchments, but only to brief representatives from AgForce in Brisbane and a small number of stakeholder groups, in the view of AgForce, industry and communities was manifestly disingenuous.

AgForce's immediate response to this was to request an extension to the consultation period and conduct at our cost a consultation process with the affected stakeholders, including graziers, Indigenous peoples, the resource sector, local governments, tourism operators, small business owners and townspeople in the Basin.

### **Recommendations from the AgForce Consultation Program**

As a result of AgForce's consultation process throughout the Lake Eyre Basin, the following recommendations are provided to Queensland Government:

1. Government needs to complete a Regulatory Impact Statement and detailed consultation with all stakeholders in Lake Eyre Basin before considering the proposed regulatory changes.
2. The significant efforts of cross-sectoral representation in consultation processes within LEB over the past 25 years in Queensland and across the whole region need to be considered.
3. If regulatory change is deemed necessary, an evidence-based rationale and clear and detailed outline of proposed amendments or additional controls is required for consultation.

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4. For the future of the LEB, periodic and inclusive consultation is essential amongst Indigenous, agriculture, resource, tourism, conservation and rural-residential stakeholders, for inclusive governance, and achievement of agreed long-term outcomes and enduring coexistence.

### **AgForce Consultation**

AgForce staff and representatives met with over 250 people in meetings held in Longreach, Winton, Birdsville, Windorah, Eromanga, Quilpie, Thargomindah, Blackall and Boulia. These meetings were highly effective in gathering concerned landholders together in each of these centres, with more than double the number of people registered actually attending each session. Each meeting was for at least three hours, with each including:

1. A brief introduction to the consultation process and encouragement of participants to consider three questions through subsequent presentations:
  - a. What future does the region seek?
  - b. What has changed in recent years to alter this vision?
  - c. Does the government's 'Pristine Rivers' proposal move us towards this vision?
2. A presentation of the history of consultation with people in the LEB over the last 25 years.
3. A presentation of the consultation brief and speaking notes provided by Minister Enoch's office and Department of Environment staff on 16 December 2019.
4. An open discussion session answering three key questions:
  - a. Is the proposal consistent with our long-term goals in the LEB?
  - b. Is the proposal necessary?
  - c. What is of concern in the proposal?

A summary of the discussion points and responses to these questions was recorded at each session and participants were able to edit or add to these notes.

### **Summary of Responses**

The key themes from each workshop were consistent, whereby landholders and other stakeholders in the region:

- Agree on the need to preserve the clean-green and pristine nature of the Channel Country, which is critical for maintaining and further developing the organic beef industry in the region
- Are angry about a targeted ('stealthy') consultation process conducted over the Christmas break, without direct contact with those immediately affected
- Are confronted by the ambiguity and the lack of detail in the consultation materials about what may become regulated in the Strategic Environmental Area and the Designated Precinct
- Require more explanation and detail around the mapping of the Strategic Environmental Area (SEA) and Designated Precinct (DP) areas, both existing and proposed
- are concerned about the possible implications of proposed regulatory changes, such as the expansion of the SEA by 773% and addition of further, ill-defined Environmental Attributes for SEA: geomorphic/riparian processes; functioning wildlife corridors; Aboriginal cultural heritage
- Are concerned about Queensland Government's ignorance of the abundance of material and effort over 25 years of regional Lake Eyre Basin consultation and planning
- Believe there is no clearly identified problem that needs addressing – "This is just political to appease sectoral interests and meet an election promise."
- While concerned about impacts of resources infrastructure, like landholders in the Surat Basin, residents have experienced effective coexistence between agriculture and the resource sectors for over 50 years, with significant financial resources and jobs supported in regional centres.

In response to the three questions posed in each workshop, the responses are summarised as:

**1. Is the proposal consistent with our long-term goals in the LEB?**

No – This was not broadly circulated and does not reflect the many previous consultation processes over the last 20 years, which considered the economy and business along with preservation natural systems and water security along with coexistence of sectoral interests.

**2. Is the proposal necessary?**

No – It is not necessary, as the existing legislative and regulatory framework has evolved over 50 years and is working to the satisfaction of stakeholders in the region.

**3. What is of concern in the proposal?**

***No Link with Historic LEB Consultation and Pastoral, Indigenous, Resource Sector Alignment***

- The proposal ignores the evidence that the LEB is a unique and vulnerable system, which landholders in cooperation with Indigenous people have supported with a controlled and measured approach since the late 1800s “Landscape needs people!”
- Sound and profitable primary industries are the backbone of the region, along with Indigenous prosperity and aspirations
- Strong view from Traditional Owners (T.O.s) and pastoralists that they are closely aligned with each other and want the same things – future prosperity for the whole community, not just jobs for Aboriginal people, jobs for all
- “Why are we doing this now, as we have been through this many times in last 20 years?”

***Lack of Detail in Regulations and Maps***

- No detail or criteria have been provided to verify why the SEA has expanded or what will be regulated in terms of geomorphic/riparian processes, wildlife corridors or indigenous cultural heritage. Will a development application be required for property infrastructure?
- Inaccuracy of maps and lack of detail indicates sloppy science, suspicious motivations and further erodes confidence of landholders in the LEB and creates fear of the unknown.
- The lack of detail is concerning, as once the regulatory changes are approved at this level, the addition of further controls on activities is only an administrative process and not subject to wider scrutiny.
- “There’s no explanation of why SEA is catchment wide, no underlying data or rationale.”
- “The red area (DP) at Eromanga is very questionable.”

***Unwritten Potential Impacts on Agriculture***

- Concern with the ‘small print’ in shutting down agriculture
- The additional Environmental Attributes for SEA could affect grazing on floodplains
- Of major concern is the potential for risking water security with possible shutting down of dams for the pastoral industry
- Subregions are not considered with upstream irrigation ruled out, whereas these developments can balance values of upstream and downstream ecosystem health. What is right for each locality?

***Questionable Political Motivations***

- Seems to be underwritten by desire for fewer and different people in the LEB, removal of pastoral and resource industry and replacement with conservation and tourism
- This is politically motivated by Green preferences, at a cost to LEB businesses
- Sustainability of Communities is not included in proposed “outcomes for the region”
- The changing demographic in the LEB sees young people leaving and long-term decline in family grazing properties

***Questionable Representation of Indigenous Interests***

- Indigenous meeting in Longreach, 28-29 October 2019, was not attended by locally recognized Indigenous representatives, which questions the integrity of proposal.
- Traditional Owners (TOs) at AgForce meetings asked which 19 TO groups were involved?
- Questions on why TOs are asking for increased restrictions and why was outcome of October 2019 TO consultation not broadcast widely in LEB?

- Very strong views expressed by the TOs in several centres that they have not been consulted or included. They found out about the process only when resource companies told them they really should be involved. Local TOs are unaware of the LEB TO Alliance and feel they are being used/exploited and engagement is tokenism

#### ***Deterrent for Regional Development***

- This proposal places additional deterrent on people thriving and populations growing in the LEB, particularly in enabling certainty and attracting investment for resource projects
- Mining is also an opportunity for these communities and brings jobs and infrastructure
- Small-scale miners (opal) directly in proposed DP and expanded SEA are unsure of future

#### ***Very Poor Consultation Process***

- The proposal does refer to and has not consulted with existing representative structures, including landholders, NRM regional body, local TOs and townspeople
- The Queensland Government is shutting down on its obligation to work with people in the region and consult – which was what was promised in their election commitment
- The consultation process is poor and politically motivated, catering directly to remotely located conservation and Indigenous stakeholders not those directly affected
- Concern about Government desire to increase control in future without fair review

#### ***Future of Pristine Rivers Regulations Uncertain***

- Future extensions of these regulations are a concern, as to whether they can be extended to other regions and other land uses?
- Adding additional activities and areas is only an administrative process and not transparent
- Including the entire catchment as an SEA adds potential for extension to other areas

#### **About AgForce**

AgForce Queensland Farmers Limited (AgForce) is the peak rural group representing beef, sheep & wool and grain producers in Queensland. The broadacre beef, sheep and grains industries in Queensland generated around \$6.2 billion in gross farm-gate value of production in 2017-18. AgForce's purpose is to Advance Sustainable Agribusiness and facilitate the long-term growth, viability, competitiveness and profitability of these industries. The producers who support AgForce provide high-quality food and fibre to Australian and overseas consumers, manage around 55% of the Queensland mainland and contribute significantly to the social fabric of rural and remote communities.

#### **Conclusion**

AgForce seek an urgent meeting with the Minister to discuss how best to proceed with protection of the Channel Country. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Senior Policy Officer, Dr Greg Leach on (07) 3236 3100 or: [leachg@agforceqld.org.au](mailto:leachg@agforceqld.org.au).

We also include an invoice for our direct costs. It is the hope of members that in good faith the Government can reimburse their organisation for the direct costs of undertaking this work.

Yours sincerely



Mike Guerin  
Chief Executive Officer

Enc: Invoice for AgForce's reasonable and direct costs for conducting the consultation.

cc: The Hon Leeanne Enoch – By Email  
The Hon Mark Furner – By Email

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