

Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries
Queensland Government
The Hon Mark Furner



01 May 2018

Dear Minister

It was good to meet you at the round-table meeting with HRH Prince Charles at Mossman on 8 April.

I write on behalf of Queensland members of Australian Forest Growers (AFG). AFG is the peak national body representing private forest growers. Our branches are located in all corners of Australia and our membership ranges across a broad spectrum from large to small scale, managing both natural and planted forests. AFG members are united in the belief that growing and managing trees on private land for timber and other commercial purposes has a broad range of economic, environmental and social benefits for their own enterprises and for the local and wider community. AFG was established to promote this view, to provide support for those involved in commercial tree growing and to help develop effective policy to underpin these endeavours.

RE: Vegetation Management Amendment Bill 2018 – plantation exemption

It was with considerable disappointment that I noted the recommendation of the Chair of the Parliamentary State Development, Natural Resources and Agricultural Industry Development Committee to proceed with this bill without recommending any changes to address the legitimate concerns raised in the many submissions and at public consultation hearings held over the last 6-8 weeks.

AFG appreciates that the Queensland government made an election commitment to reintroduce this bill into this term of Parliament but we were hoping for a workable Bill with broad bi-partisan and community support. This would now seem unlikely if the Bill is passed in its current form, which is to the detriment of all stakeholders and interest groups.

I write specifically to request your support in Cabinet and on the Floor of the House to ensure that tree plantations of Australian native tree species established for wood production are not inadvertently affected by the proposed changes to the Vegetation Management Act. You also met Alex Lindsay at the HRH Prince of Wales Mossman round-table – Alex is President of the QLD chapter of IFA, an experienced professional forester (as am I) and a strong supporter of AFG members in north QLD. Alex appeared before the Parliamentary Committee hearing in Cairns to advocate our positions but along with other petitioners appears to have been ignored in terms of improving the legislation that I understand will be introduced to the House today. Points raised below summarise a number of our concerns that Alex detailed in a submission and in his presentation in Cairns to the Parliamentary Committee.

I note that substantial areas of privately owned plantation forest is planted with native species, either as monocultures or mixed species stands. The Queensland Government has in the past, and continues to encourage landowners to plant these plantations, which will form an important part of the wood resources of the future.

The proposed amendments extend protection measures for Category C High Value Regrowth to include Freehold Land, Indigenous Land and Occupation Licences. The definition for High Value Regrowth has been amended to mean “native woody vegetation that has not been cleared for 15 years, and forms an Endangered, Of Concern or Least Concern Ecosystem”. I recommend that this definition be amended to clarify that it should exclude areas of planted forest.

Previous dealings by AFG and Institute of Foresters of Australia (IFA) members with the Department of Natural Resources in relation to plantation forests incorrectly mapped as Remnant have shown that the presence of any species in the planted forest that is named on the Regional Ecosystem description is sufficient basis for the Department to determine that it forms the regional ecosystem. However, the fact that the stand is planted has been sufficient to disqualify it from being Remnant. Inserting the 'planted forest exclusion' clause into the definition of High Value Regrowth would serve a similar purpose.

Similarly, the proposed amendments seek to protect regrowth native vegetation within 50 metres of watercourses within the catchments. Many privately owned plantations are contained within this zone, and I request that the definition be clarified to exclude planted forests, for the same reasons outlined above. Without such clarification, routine silvicultural practices may be considered as destroying native vegetation whereas in fact they are required to ensure the health and vigour of these plantings as well as associated understorey plants to maximise their benefit in stabilising riparian zones and minimising sediment run off to the Great Barrier Reef.

I note that if landowners have previously registered a Property Map of Assessable Vegetation (PMAV) they will not be affected by the proposed changes. However, the evidence seems to be that many landowners have not, and the proposed amendments prevent an area shown as Category C or Category R to be shown as Category X, for any PMAV application made after 8 March. In order for a plantation to be excised from Category C or Category R, there needs to be the basis for showing it is incorrectly mapped, thus the need for clarification of the definition.

Lastly, as an interim measure in the case where a landowner has not applied for a PMAV, I request that routine operations in planted forests, undertaken in accordance with the Timber Plantation Operations Code of Practice for Queensland (July 2015), be specifically identified as an accepted clearing practice in the Category C and Category R clearing codes.

I trust that as the Minister responsible for Forestry in Queensland that you will be able to exercise some influence on your Parliamentary colleagues and Minister Lynham to support amendments to this Draft Bill that will address the concerns raised above.

Representing AFG members and other small farm forest growers in Queensland, I suggest that we all would like to see a science-based Vegetation Management Act that affords long term certainty in rural communities and supports professional land, forest and tree plantation management for the benefit of all rural landholders and the environment that we all want appropriately protected for future generations.

Yours Sincerely,



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CC:

- Honourable Anastacia Palaszczuk Queensland Premier and Minister for Trade
- Honourable Anthony Lynham, Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy
- Honourable Leeanne Enoch, Minister for Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, Minister for Science and Minister for the Arts
- Mrs Deb Frecklington, Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Minister for Trade

- Mr Tony Perrett, Shadow Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Forestry
- Mr David Crisafulli, Shadow Minister for Environment, Science and the Great Barrier Reef
- Mr Dale Last, Shadow Minister for Natural Resources and Mines Shadow Minister for Northern Queensland
- Mr Shane Knuth, Member for Hill
- Mr Rob Katter, Member for Traeger