



QUEENSLAND FARMERS' FEDERATION

Primary Producers House, Level 3, 183 North Quay, Brisbane QLD 4000
PO Box 12009 George Street, Brisbane QLD 4003
qfarmers@qff.org.au | 07 3837 4720
ABN 44 055 764 488

Submission

22 June 2018

Agriculture Review (Aither)

Level 2, 45 Exhibition St

PO Box 318

MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Via email: agreview@aither.com.au

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Review of interactions between the EPBC Act and the agriculture sector

The Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) is the united voice of intensive agriculture in Queensland. It is a federation that represents the interests of peak state and national agriculture industry organisations, which in turn collectively represent more than 13,000 primary producers across the state. QFF engages in a broad range of economic, social, environmental and regional issues of strategic importance to the productivity, sustainability and growth of the agricultural sector. QFF's mission is to secure a strong and sustainable future for Queensland farmers by representing the common interests of our member organisations:

- CANEGROWERS
- Cotton Australia
- Growcom
- Nursery & Garden Industry Queensland (NGIQ)
- Queensland Chicken Growers Association (QCGA)
- Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation (QDO)
- Australian Cane Farmers Association (ACFA)
- Flower Association
- Pork Queensland Inc.
- Queensland United Egg Producers (QUEP)
- Bundaberg Regional Irrigators Group (BRIG)
- Burdekin River Irrigation Area Irrigators Ltd (BRIA)
- Central Downs Irrigators Ltd (CDIL)
- Pioneer Valley Water Cooperative Ltd (PV Water)
- Queensland Chicken Meat Council (QCMC).

QFF welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the independent review of interactions between the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) and the agriculture sector. QFF provides this submission without prejudice to any additional submission provided by our members or individual farmers.

The united voice of intensive agriculture



Background

QFF understands the independent review report will be provided to the Australian Government to consider as part of the next statutory independent review of the EPBC Act, which is to commence no later than October 2019.

QFF acknowledges the EPBC Act is the Australian Government's central piece of environmental legislation, providing a legal framework to protect and manage nationally and internationally important flora, fauna, ecological communities and heritage places – defined in the Act as matters of national environmental significance (MNES). The scope of the Act covers a range of sectors, including agriculture which is impacted in several ways.

On behalf of our member organisations, QFF has maintained a keen interest in the implementation and operation of the Act. A chief concern has been the continuing ambiguity with the nature and magnitude of development or action that could result in a 'significant impact' and what exactly constitutes a 'significant impact' (thereby requiring a referral) on MNES.

QFF and members strongly welcome this independent review. The fact that it has been commissioned to specifically identify regulatory and non-regulatory improvements to assist the sector while maintaining environmental standards is firm acknowledgement that these burdens exist. It is also encouraging that it is accepted that business structures across the sector are more diverse and generally find it more difficult to comply with these burdens. QFF therefore hopes that the review will result in demonstrable actions that help farmers.

Concerns

QFF notes that compared to other sectors, the number of referrals under the Act from the agriculture sector has remained consistently low. It remains the case that the agriculture sector has concerns with the Act in its current form which include:

- Understanding obligations under the Act.
- The inflexibility of the Act which makes it difficult to comply.
- The poor communication and interpretation under the Act.
- The alignment between State and Commonwealth law.
- The complicated nature of the Act.

QFF provides the following points for the review to consider:

Outcomes consistent with 'triple bottom line' principles

Comprehensive scientific, economic and social advice should be provided by way of informed committees. The Threatened Species Scientific Committee should look at expertise within the sector in the context of listings that apply to agricultural land to give the sector confidence in listings.

Alignment between State and Commonwealth jurisdictions

QFF acknowledges that progress has been made in aligning State and Commonwealth law with the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to develop and implement a Common Assessment Method (CAM). The MOU sets the frame of operations but does not address consistent identification definition and management of regimes for species across jurisdictions and the nation. QFF supports implementing formal bilateral negotiations to resolve how to ensure that a farmer can get a single set of advice on their site and be protected from sanction if the advice is adhered to.

Revised communication processes

Improved communication of farmer responsibilities and tools for helping farmers make decisions is needed. QFF understands there is a lack of awareness in the farming community around the EPBC Act, the actions that trigger assessment, and there is no obvious way for farmers to know when new listings of species and ecological communities are developed in areas where they can be affected.

Addressing these communication gaps would benefit compliance. Most industry organisations are considered 'trusted advisers' and are likely the best vehicle to help achieve this.

Recognition that costs associated with natural resource management and environment reforms is a community-wide responsibility

There is a public benefit through private expenditure, particularly regarding MNES. However, landholders are currently bearing the cost of public good conservation. Payment for environmental services and other similar mechanisms have been discussed and trialled for some time. However, broadly speaking, they are not comprehensive and seem to remain in 'concept' or 'pilot' phases. There needs to be much greater recognition of the environmental management role farmers play, and subsequently, more consistent and structured environmental and stewardship payment arrangements.

Concluding comments

The agricultural sector has an integral interest in working within the environment and sustaining it to ensure environmental health outcomes that allow farmers to carry out their business into the future. It is essential for farmers to invest in and maintain healthy and productive landscapes. Protecting high value environmental assets is an inherent part of achieving this.

QFF agree that Queensland landholders play a critical role in ensuring MNES under the EPBC Act are protected. Therefore it is vital that agriculture and the protection of MNES under the Act function harmoniously and in perpetuity – both are essential for the long-term prosperity of the state and nation.

If you have any queries about this submission, please contact Adam Knapp adam@qff.org.au.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Travis Tobin', is written in a cursive style.

Travis Tobin
Chief Executive Officer