

24 January 2019

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Dear Committee Secretariat,

**Submission : Inquiry into the impact on the agricultural sector of vegetation and land management policies, regulations and restrictions**

1. Thank-you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Committee regarding the Inquiry into the impact on the agricultural sector of vegetation and land management policies, regulations and restrictions.

**Background**

2. I am a fourth-generation cattle grazer in the Gaeta district north of Gin Gin in the Bundaberg Regional Council area in Queensland. My family own and operate three cattle properties and also own a state forest lease that was converted into the Bulburin National Park in 2006. Our lease will expire in June 2023.
3. I am also a qualified solicitor and own and operate my own firm, Marland Law in Bundaberg. I act for landholders across Queensland on a variety of matters but specialise in vegetation management and natural resource law. I act for a number of landholders defending themselves under prosecution by the State Government for breaches of the vegetation regulations including for the applicable widths of fire breaks.

## 2018 Central Queensland Fires

4. 1,000,000 hectares of land was burnt in the Central Queensland bushfires in November and December 2018. The large majority of the area burnt was national park or in what is classified as “remnant” vegetation. “Remnant” vegetation is basically State sanctioned national park on privately held land. 105 individual fires burnt from Mackay in the north through to Bundaberg in the south.
5. During the fires, I was with 25 volunteer rural fire fighters from my local Kolonga Fire brigade who donated 10 days fighting just one of the fires that ravaged the state and consumed 50,000 hectares in our little district called Gaeta north of Gin Gin. We were helped by QFES and RFBA and 100s of volunteer rural fire fighters from as far away as Newcastle. My family lost 4000 acres and the fire came within 200 meters of our home. I **attach** a map showing the boundaries of the fire. The blue sections are “Remnant” vegetation.<sup>1</sup>
6. My family and community consider we have earned the right to comment on what caused these fires and how they may be prevented in the future. We also consider that our Government and its leaders have the obligation to at least listen to what we have to say.

## Bulburin National Park

7. In 1996, my family bought a 4000-acre state forest lease that adjoins our freehold property called “Mt Wallaby”. We bought it so we could manage the noxious weeds and feral animals that over flowed onto our home property.
8. “Our lease” was converted to a national park in 2006 through the South East Queensland Forestry Agreement and a convenient preference deal struck by Peter Beattie and the rainforest society for green preferences in inner city Brisbane.
9. I call it “our” lease because that’s how we treat it - like it’s ours. We think of it and would like to manage it like our freehold country that’s been in my family for 150 years. We have

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix 1

real skin in the game. We don't talk about conservation, we live it. We don't think the environment is some far off wonderland, it's our home. We put our livelihood and our lives on the line to protect it. I'd like to hand it down to my children so they can do the same, and their kids after them.

10. "Our Lease" is one of 72 leases across the state to be impacted - a total of 1,200,000 acres. That's 72 rural families locked out of land they have managed for generations on the ideologically driven notion that by removing humans from the environment it will simply return to the garden of Eden. I'm not sure the lantana, feral pigs and bushfires will comply with the eviction notice.
11. In 2012, our lease was converted to a rolling term lease. This meant that while the conservation values of the lease would be retained and protected, we could continue to run cattle and manage our lease as we have successfully done for 20 years. Managing includes eradicating declared and noxious weeds, feral animals and pests and also undertaking bushfire mitigation measures.
12. In 2016, the Queensland Labor Government amended Section 39 of the *Nature Conservation Act (NCA)* to allow them to revert our lease to a term lease.<sup>2</sup> This means that existing leases cannot be renewed when they expire. The justification for the amendments to the NCA was that cattle grazing does not accord with "the conservation of nature"<sup>3</sup>. The rent that lessees pay on the leases, the rates we pay to local government, the tens of thousands of dollars we invest and hundreds of man hours we spent managing weeds, feral pigs and bushfires must also not accord with the "conservation of nature" as these contributions will go when our lease ends.
13. Since 2016, because our lease is now a national park, each year we must apply for a permit to undertake fuel load reduction back burns. We applied for a permit with Queensland Parks and Wildlife in December 2017, followed up in June 2018 and visited Parks and Wildlife offices in Bundaberg three times in October 2018. We are still waiting for a permit

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<sup>2</sup> Appendix 2

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-04-26/cattle-grazing-leases-in-qld-national-parks-no-renewal/6422408>

or even a phone call. In a cruel irony, after the fires decimated our land and business, we received an application form in the mail to apply for next year's permit.<sup>4</sup>

14. At the start of October 2018, we received 4 inches of rain and through a permit issued by our local fire warden, safely back burned our freehold country. This area was spared during the November fires. As we didn't have a permit, it was illegal to do the same preventative measures in "our lease".
15. On the 26th of November 2018 - in 40-degree heat and 80km winds a runaway fire jumped the 30-metre-wide Kalpowar road and entered our lease.
16. The fire burnt the entire 4000 acres of our lease along with the majority of the Bulburin National Park. Some would blame climate change. I blame Government incompetence. If we had been allowed to safely back burn when the conditions suited as we did with our freehold country, there would have been no need for the extent of the carnage.
17. The fire burnt with such intensity, fuelled by extremely high fuel loads, that 300-year-old river blue gums burnt at the stump. These trees were probably saplings when Captain Cook arrived and have survived 300 years of European settlement. All that is left is their charred remains. An area once abundant with birds, koalas, possums, sugar gliders - is now eerily quiet. The earliest signs of regeneration are the lantana bushes and feral pigs feasting on the burnt carcasses. Scientists say that the biodiversity stored in the burnt National Parks may take 100s of years to regenerate<sup>5</sup> and the carbon lost from soils can take 80 years to recover.<sup>6</sup>
18. In 2023, we will be excluded from running cattle in "our lease". For the first time since our area was settled in 1890 cattle will no longer be able to graze our land. The extreme fuel loads associated with overgrown vegetation and noxious weeds will be further exacerbated as the native grasses that proliferate in our high rain fall sclerophyll forests will not be able

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<sup>4</sup> **Appendix 3**

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-12-04/eungella-rainforest-future-questioned-by-expert/10578802>

<sup>6</sup> <https://theconversation.com/forest-soil-needs-decades-or-centuries-to-recover-from-fires-and-logging-110171>

to be reduced by safe cattle grazing. Back burning and fire breaks are important but reducing fuel loads through safe low intensity cattle grazing is probably just as important.

19. Further, “we” will be excluded from “our lease”. No one to pay for and maintain the firebreaks, no one to manage the weeds and feral pests and no one to do the back burns when the conditions are right. Some may say the government can just employ more park rangers to do the job for us. My 70-year-old father didn’t sleep for 5 days trying to fight this most recent fire. A 9 to 5 public servant won’t have the same commitment as a family and community trying to protect their livelihoods and their homes. They will also not gain the experience of a life lived on the land from a text book.
20. The new “national park” boundary is also 200 meters from our home - that home has been there since 1891. We’ve managed these lands for generations. We love our land and respect it. When we are excluded from “our lease” in 2023 it will still be our neighbour. I hold little hope of politicians, government bureaucrats or employees coming to our assistance when the next bush fire happens.
21. The Queensland State Governments response to these fires is that they have been caused by climate change and there is nothing that they could have done.<sup>7</sup> It’s analogous to saying the sea causes drownings so there is no point learning how to swim or teaching your child the dangers of the ocean.
22. The Premier also callously asked “*where were the critics when we were fighting these fires?*”<sup>8</sup> The arrogance and naivety is astounding. As National Parks were still being incinerated, people where fighting for their homes and livelihoods and millions of wildlife where still smouldering, our Premier cannot humble herself to even consider that her poor environmental policies, compounded over 30 years of mismanagement and ideology, might actually be wrong and punishing the very thing they are trying to protect and those that actually have the best chance of protecting it.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/state-politics/climate-change-sparked-queensland-fires-palaszczuk/news-story/f53d18ad6a31de86a34be481a3bceada>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.couriermail.com.au/news/opinion/premier-responds-to-accusations-of-land-mismanagement/news-story/8e1225985b057cb01deaf41efec46bb8>

## Climate Change and Fire

23. Scientists agree that Australia's climate has been trending toward more bushfire weather over the last 30 years.<sup>9</sup> The Climate Commission has found that "*the intensity and seasonality of large bushfires in south-east Australia appears to be changing, with climate change a possible contributing factor.*"<sup>10</sup> A 2006 report by the Bushfire CRC acknowledges the complexity of climate predictions pointing out "*much of Australia's vegetation has a complex evolutionary and dependent relationship with fire. Fire has been part of these environments for tens of thousands of years and much native flora and fauna remains dependent on it in various ways.*"<sup>11</sup> In 2007, a study by the CSIRO found evidence that climate change will lead to increases in very high and extreme fire danger rating days and earlier onset of the fire season.<sup>12</sup>
24. David Bowman, Professor of Pyrogeography and Fire Science at the University of Tasmania has said "*rainforests are non-burnable. That's one of their distinguishing features. So if a rainforest is burning, that's really significant*".<sup>13</sup> Rachel Nolan, a fire ecologist from the University of Western Sydney, says climate change means conditions are drier, as well as warmer by stating "*there's a couple of things that contribute to the risk of fire – the fuel load, the amount of material that can burn, and how dry that fuel is.*"<sup>14</sup> Dr David Packham, bushfire expert and research fellow at Monash University, argues that high fuel loads in bushland led to the destructive intensity of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires, saying that "*there has been total mismanagement of the Australian forest environment.*"<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> "Bushfire weather in Southeast Australia: Media Brief", *The Climate Institute*, 26 September 2007. Retrieved 24 October 2013

<sup>10</sup> "The Critical Decade: Climate science, risks and responses" Archived 24 October 2013 at the Wayback Machine, *The Climate Commission*, 2011. Retrieved 24 October 2014

<sup>11</sup> "CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS IMPACT ON THE MANAGEMENT OF BUSHFIRE" (. *Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre. September 2006. p. 4. Retrieved 25 October 2013*

<sup>12</sup> Jones, Roger. "Fire and climate change: don't expect a smooth ride". *The Conversation*. Retrieved 24 October 2013

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-12-08/from-space,-the-ferocity-of-queenslands-bushfires-is-revealed/10594662?section=environment>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/dec/04/bushfires-tropics-queensland-terrifying-new-reality-cyclones-flooding>

<sup>15</sup> Rood, David (10 February 2009). "Forest strategies questioned".

25. Whether or not one subscribes to the notion of human induced global warming and climate change is irrelevant. The reality is with a warming climate, with more intense and widespread bushfires, it is important now more than ever that we look at taking practical and achievable measures to mitigate against future holocaust bushfires. We may not be able to adjust the thermostat as easily as we can implement measures on the ground that save lives and the environment.

### **“Unprecedented” fires**

26. The nomenclature of a Governments bereft of the ability to look past the next news cycle or election term appears to be the use of the term “unprecedented”. The use of the term engenders a belief that the situation has never been experienced before therefore the failure of government policy can be forgiven. Added with the catch all phrase of “climate change” provides a platform of essentially unlimited plausible deniability when it comes to environmental and land use policy. *“How were we to know?”* or *“there is nothing we could do!”* is harped after every natural disaster and each one is framed as worse than before.
27. The Queensland Labor Government’s response to the 2018 Central Queensland fires was that they were “unprecedented” and had been caused, and caused only, by climate change. Anyone would have thought that this was the first or at least biggest bushfire in both Australia and Queensland’s history.
28. One of Australia’s largest bushfires, the “Black Thursday” fire burnt 5 million hectares of Victorian scrub. That was in 1851. I don’t think they were worried about changing the weather when they were using wet sacks trying to save their homes.
29. In 1951, 2,800,000 hectares of land burnt in south west Queensland. In 1974 - 7,600,000 hectares burnt again in the same area. A summary of the fire history in Queensland shows that our environment has always been susceptible to bushfire and their impacts.<sup>16</sup>
30. The “Black Saturday” bushfires, Australia’s most deadly bushfire, consumed 450,000 hectares and with it 178 lives in Victoria. While the death and carnage was “unprecedented”

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<sup>16</sup> Appendix 4

the bushfire itself was not. The Black Saturday bushfire triggered a Royal Commission. Despite the loss of the life, a full royal commission it is reported that fuel levels in Victoria are the same if not **higher** than in 2009.

31. The weather conditions experienced during the Central Queensland bushfires were classified as “catastrophic” for the first time - although the rating has only existed since 2009. However, no bushfire in Queensland since 1966, when warnings were first introduced, would have been considered so dangerous.”<sup>17</sup>
32. I won’t lie, the conditions during these recent fires were horrific. Trying to fight a fire in 80 kilometre winds and 40 degree heat is not a fun place to be. But when you are surrounded by overgrown vegetation on a narrow, hastily constructed firebreak - it’s just dangerous. It’s hard to describe the feeling of standing on a fire break less than 5 meters wide with 30-meter-high eucalypts engulfed in flames. The heat, the smoke and the noise are all consuming – literally.
33. Fires in our area aren’t new, the only thing that was “unprecedented” about them is the compounding effect of years of Government ineptitude.

### **Management of National Parks**

34. In 2017-18, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service conducted planned burns over an area of nearly 943,000 hectares. This was the most in five years, and well above the average of about 632,000 hectares.”<sup>18</sup> Queensland has over 250 national parks covering 8,138,792 hectares.<sup>19</sup> The average planned burns are only 7% per year. Preventative backburning is not a simple process. It requires the right seasonal and weather conditions and also well-formed and accessible fire breaks and experienced and competent personnel. Quite clearly having 8,500,000 hectares of heavily timbered, inaccessible and steep terrain makes proper

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.greatwalks.com.au/news/fire-damage-closes-40-qld-national-parks#mAv5FWJSR6WEzmuW.99>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.ausleisure.com.au/news/queensland-national-parks-start-reopening-in-aftermath-of-bushfires/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.qhatlas.com.au/national-parks-queensland>



management difficult. Despite this, the so called “conservationists” want more land taken from private ownership and placed into the mismanaged public system.<sup>20</sup>

## Firebreaks

35. The legal width that a landholder can clear to establish and maintain a firebreak is an uncertain question in Queensland. It can also be an expensive one.<sup>21</sup> The Premier claims that “*Fire breaks are exempt. No permit required*”<sup>22</sup> She even helpfully provides a link to the website! I don’t blame the Premier for not knowing much about firebreaks, she has probably never needed one let alone had to build or maintain one. You don’t get too many bushfires rampaging around her seat of Inala or up William Street to the Premiers building in Brisbane.

### ***How wide can a firebreak be in Queensland?***

36. Schedule 21 to the Planning Regulations 2017 (Qld) (**PR**) provides exempt clearing work for the clearing of native vegetation mapped as “Remnant Vegetation.” The Schedule provides a list of exemptions for what is termed “essential management”. “*Essential Management*” is defined in the dictionary at Schedule 24 to the PR. The relevant activities, related to firebreaks, which are exempt pursuant to the definition of “essential management” are:

- (a) For establishing or maintaining a necessary firebreak to protect Infrastructure (other than a fence, road or vehicular track) if the maximum width of the firebreak is equivalent to 1.5 times the height of the tallest vegetation next to the infrastructure or 20 metres, whichever is the wider; or
- (b) For establishing a necessary fire management line if the maximum width of the clearing for the fire management line is 10 metres.

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-10-01/queensland-needs-more-national-parks-say-conservationists/10325392>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.queenslandcountrylife.com.au/story/4550129/trees-why-michael-baker-is-appealing/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.couriermail.com.au/news/opinion/premier-responds-to-accusations-of-land-mismanagement/news-story/8e1225985b057cb01deaf41efec46bb8>

For establishing or maintaining a necessary firebreak to protect infrastructure

37. “Infrastructure” was defined in the dictionary to the former Sustainable Planning Act 2009 as including “*land, facilities, services and works used for supporting economic activity and meeting environmental needs*”. “Land” was defined as “*used for the support of economic activity and meeting environmental needs*”. It was reasonably arguable, that in relation to a cattle property that the protection of “Infrastructure” to support “economic activity” would be to construct firebreaks to protect land which has “grass and associated resources”. If the grass is scorched, there won’t be much economic activity going on. Likewise, the exemption could be extended to other forms of “economic activity” such as cultivation, forestry, plantations etc conducted on Land.
38. One would think it would be reasonable to gauge the appropriate width of a fire break by the height of the timber next to it. One is in relation to how high and how hot the flames might be but also if a tree burns and falls that it doesn’t breach the width of the break. It would also be reasonable that a landholder could construct a fire break along the boundary of his or her property to prevent or mitigate against fires entering their property but also escaping.
39. However, in 2016, the Queensland Labor Government amended the Planning Act Schedule 2 – Dictionary so that Infrastructure **does not** now include “*land, facilities, services or works for environmental offsets*”. This now removes the ability for a landholder to construct a firebreak to protect their property based on the height of the vegetation. It is also uncertain what “facilities” mean. Does it include your house, your sheds, your yards?

For establishing a necessary fire management line if the maximum width of the clearing for the fire management line is 10 metres.

40. The relevant consideration of this exemption is “*establishing*” and “*necessary*”. The regulation imports that any *new* fire management line, where necessary, can be a maximum width of 10 metres. It is uncertain how the limit of 10 meters was derived.

***So how wide should a firebreak actually be?***

41. The Victorian “Black Saturday” Bushfires in 2009 caused the death of 173 people, destroyed 450,000 hectares of land, 2000 homes and \$4.4 billion in loss. The Royal Commission headed by Justice Bernard Teague was commenced in 2010. The Commission conducted an extensive investigation into the causes of, the preparation for, the response to and the impact of the fires. The Commission made 69 recommendations ranging from fire safety policy, incident management, fireground response, cause of fire, planning and building land and fuel management. Recommendation 37 provided for a co-ordination of bushfire hazard mapping to identify areas of high risk and specialised management.
43. The Queensland Government in their response to the Royal Commission committed to a review of the State Planning Policy 1/03: *Mitigating the Adverse Impacts of Flood, Bushfire and Landslide (SPP1/03)* and the implementation of Recommendation 37. SPP1/03 specifies criteria for mapping high, medium and low hazard areas and nominates the QFRS as the contact point for local government mapping of bushfire hazard used in planning schemes. Hazard maps produced by QFRS are provided to local governments as a guide to bushfire hazard conditions.
44. In 2014, the CSIRO, funded by the Queensland Government through the Natural Disaster Resilience Program developed a new state-wide mapping methodology to identify Bushfire Prone Areas in support of the bushfire hazard provisions of Queensland State Planning Policy which came into effect on 2 December 2013.
45. The Report, titled “*A new methodology for State-wide mapping of bushfire prone areas in Queensland*”<sup>23</sup> produced a full series of state-wide mapping products at 25 m resolution including landscape slope, vegetation hazard classification, fire weather severity, potential fire line intensity, bushfire prone areas, grassfire prone areas and low hazard areas.
46. The Report identified that Potential Impact Buffers adjacent to very high, high and medium areas are subject to significant flame attack.
47. The analysis of heat radiation decay curves and national research indicates that in most fires, over 80% of housing loss and 80% of human life loss occurred within **100 meters** of bushland (*Chen and McAneney 2004, Bianchi, Leonard et al 2013*).

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<sup>23</sup> Appendix 5

48. The width of 100 metres also coincides with the approximate distance needed to avoid injury to people without specialised protective clothing due to radiant heat exposure from a bush fire with a very high intensity.
49. The Report also undertook an assessment of the vegetation hazard classifications of land systems across Queensland. The Department of Sustainability and Environment "*Overall Fuel Hazard Assessment Guideline*" was used to support the estimation of Potential Fuel Loads for each vegetation hazard class. Vegetation hazard classes ranged from 33 tonnes to the HA to 1 tonne.
50. The Report generated a map of Queensland showing the Potential Fuel Loads for Queensland. The Map is shown on page 13 of the Report. Interestingly, the 2018 fires that occurred in Mackay, Rockhampton, Calliope, Gladstone and Bundaberg are all in 30 to 33tonne / fuel load environments.
51. The Report also undertook an assessment of Potential Fire Line Intensity. Fire line intensity is classed as "very high" (40,000Kw/m), "high" (20,000 to 40,000 kw/m) and medium (0 to 20,000 kw/m). On page 19 of the Report, fire line intensity was displayed up to areas of 48,000 kilowatts per metre. Interestingly again, the majority of the 2018 fires where located in areas of high to extreme fire line intensity.
52. The Report further undertook a radiant heat profile to assess the fire line intensity in areas of very high to high areas. Two radiation thresholds are relevant to the protection of human safety during the passage of a fire front. To put the assessment into perspective, human skin is damaged by exposure levels greater than 2kw/m. The profile demonstrated that the **minimum** distance for a fire 4,000kw/m is **40 meters** and for 40,000Kw/m and **above 100 meters**.<sup>24</sup>
53. A CSIRO publication "*Bushfires in Australia*"<sup>25</sup> looked at the historical effectiveness of fires throughout Australia. They found that breaks between 30 to 60 meters were required to reduce susceptibility of fire spread in high fuel load and remote locations. The study also included the combined practices of fuel load reduction activities, seasonal cool burns and mitigation activities.

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<sup>24</sup> See page 23 of the Report.

<sup>25</sup> **Appendix 6**

54. In Joan Webster OAM *“Essential Bushfire Safety tips”*<sup>26</sup> she advises that fire breaks should be between 30 to 100 meters in open forest country and up to 300 meters in dense scrub.
55. Cheney and Sullivan’s *“Grassfires – Fuel, weather and fire behaviour”*<sup>27</sup> recommends that a fire break of 10 meters wide can hold a 10 MW/m fire (4t/ha fuel load travelling at 5km per hour). The break will hold faster moving fires with lighter fuel loads. However, when wind speed exceeds 25 km/h will make a 10m wide fire break ineffective. Under strong winds in extreme fire danger breaks of 40-meter width can be ineffective in stopping the spread of a running fire. However, when integrated with parallel fire lines, backburning and active suppression, can be arrested.
56. Fire spotting, where embers are thrown in advance of a fire front, are another consideration for the appropriate widths of fire breaks. In 2007, researches under took “Project Vesta” which studied fire in dry eucalypt forests.<sup>28</sup> The study found that fires with a flame height of 8 meters with 20 km winds can throw embers 1250 meters. Even in 3-meter-high flames can throw embers 100 meters.
57. The science would appear to support that a 10-meter fire break is essentially ineffective as a fire break in any fire above medium intensity. Even breaks that are 1.5 times the height of the nearest tree, in certain conditions can also be breached. For medium to high intensity fires a buffer of 100 meters is recommended.
58. I am not suggesting every landholder be allowed to clear 100 meters along the boundary of their properties. However, there needs to be an appropriate assessment of the fire risk in an area, the height of the vegetation and the accessibility.

### **Cattle grazing**

59. If you listen to the urban media, cattle grazing has become the new “climate criminal”. From causing climate change, droughts, floods or the next apocalypse - the humble bovine appears to be the blame. Cattle are so evil they are now excluded from our national estate and national parks as not aligning with “the conservation of nature”.

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<sup>26</sup> Appendix 7

<sup>27</sup> Appendix 8

<sup>28</sup> Appendix 9

60. The practical reality is, low intensity cattle grazing plays a critical part in safely reducing hazardous fuel loads.<sup>29</sup> Some scientists claim that cattle grazing doesn't have any significant impact on the reduction of fire intensity or severity.<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, the research provides that cattle in heavily forested eucalypt forests are unable to reduce fuel loads as a result of the volume of material that makes up the forest floor and structure. In comparison, fire intensity in grasslands is much lower, fires are easier to control and grasslands recover more rapidly after fire. Perhaps the answer is that forests need to have their density reduced, through silviculture and sustainable logging add with low intensity grazing to allow appropriate management.
61. Research conducted by the California Cooperative Extension has revealed that the grazing of livestock plays an important role in bush fire mitigation in forests and range lands.<sup>31</sup> The research shows that targeted grazing is a safer option than simply undertaking hazard reduction burns as cattle grazing can be conducted all year round and in any weather condition.
62. The benefit of reduction of fuel loads by safe grazing is obvious. See **Appendix 11**. This photo was taken on the boundary of our grazed lease (on the right) and one that has had cattle removed for 5 years. Despite the reduced fuel loads, the fire was still able to burn with extreme intensity in the grazed areas during unfavourable fire conditions. Imagine the fires intensity if livestock are excluded?
63. I don't propose that those that seek to deride cattle peacefully grazing among the eucalypts have anything personal against them. It's more likely that the prejudice is against those that put them there – graziers. The sad irony, by removing cattle from national parks and forested areas, you are actually removing those that have managed and cared for the land for generations.

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<sup>29</sup> **Appendix 10**

<sup>30</sup> <https://theconversation.com/new-research-shows-alpine-grazing-does-not-reduce-blazing-20705>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.feedstuffs.com/news/livestock-grazing-helps-california-tackle-wildfires>

64. Professor Suri Ratnapala states that *“if you don’t put a value on something, how do you know what its worth?”*<sup>32</sup> A dollar spent on a national park is a dollar less for a hospital, road or school. I am not suggesting that national parks have no value or that they should be made to make a profit, but they do cost money to run (or more accurately Governments dont spend money to properly run them). By retaining industries that are both ecologically and financially sustainable allows the environment to be both better managed and with less draw on the public purse. There is also a faster response to things like an outbreak of a noxious weed, or a feral animal or the outbreak of a fire.
65. The Governments reasoning for excluding cattle from national parks is *“that national parks should be for the conservation of nature, and it’s not hard to see how widespread grazing could be contradictory to that purpose.”*<sup>33</sup> However, there was not one study or investigation into the impacts of cattle grazing on Queensland national parks by the Labor Government prior to the enactment of the SEQFA and the banning of cattle in national parks or since.<sup>34</sup> The basis for excluding livestock was purely a political one with no recognition of the important part that landholders play in managing the environment.

### **Vegetation thickening**

66. As a result of “locking up” vast areas of heavily forested country, changed grazing and fire regimes has resulted in woodlands across Queensland becoming thicker.
67. Esteemed woodland ecologist, Dr Bill Burrows, has published extensively on the phenomenon of woodland thickening and its adverse environment impacts for over 40 years. The question Burrows asks is – *“how certain are we that the vegetation we see today is representative of what was originally present prior to European settlement?”* Burrows cites a large volume of literature that supports the position that pre-European Queensland, due to the intensive fire regime implemented for 60,000 years, was in fact a more open woodland environment that the thick mass of vegetation we see today.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> <https://www.samuelgriffith.org.au/papers/html/volume17/v17chap2.html>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-04-26/cattle-grazing-leases-in-qld-national-parks-no-renewal/6422408>

<sup>34</sup> **Appendix 12**

<sup>35</sup> **Appendix 13**

68. Added to the phenomenon of natural thickening, is the added influence of noxious weeds such as lantana, cats claw and wait-a-while. While these plants are green and have pretty flowers they are non-native, highly invasive weeds that have spread prolifically through Queensland. The incursion of these weeds has further unnaturally increased the level of fuel loads in forested areas, particularly in national parks.
69. The Queensland Government itself recognises that the vegetation is thickening.<sup>36</sup> The Statewide Landcover and Trees Study (SLATS) recognises that woodland thickening is occurring, but they have not as yet worked out by how much. This is most probably because they spend the majority of the time working out how many football fields of regrowth and mulga landholders are clearing in the State.<sup>37</sup>
70. Recent research shows that open grasslands are more reliable carbon sinks than forests due to their resilience to fires and ability to regenerate.<sup>38</sup> This is because open grass lands have reduced fuel loads when compared to forests, can be more easily managed and controlled. If the great moral test of our time is climate change – perhaps we should consider reducing the amount of trees and forests and invest more heavily in retaining open grass lands.
71. The practical example is that during the Gaeta fires in our area, any fire in open grass land could be managed and maintained. Any fire break within forested areas was breached. Even the 30-meter-wide Kalpowar road, which dense vegetation either side, could not arrest a fire in high wind speed and fuel loads. The majority of our breaks were placed in open grass lands well away from forested areas. These areas were then back burned into the fire to contain it. One further example, is where a fire has burnt out of a forest and “self-extinguished” in open grass land that has been grazed by livestock.<sup>39</sup>
72. The greatest frustration in the debate about vegetation, fire and national park management is the deliberate corruption of the science by “scientists”, politicians and the media. It is easy to sell the message that more national parks or trees should be locked up as people in

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<sup>36</sup> **Appendix 14**

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.southburnettimes.com.au/news/government-scare-mongers-about-land-clearing/3607491/>

<sup>38</sup> **Appendix 15**

<sup>39</sup> **Appendix 16**



the city think they just become flowery meadows with rainbow skies with rivers made of chocolate where children dance and laugh and play with gumdrop smiles. The reality is the Queensland bush is hard, hot and dusty. It is an uncompromising environment which has extremes that are exacerbated by our variable climate. It has wonderous beauty but ruthless in its power. People might get warm and fuzzy about converting more private land to national park but that is most likely because they don't live next to them.

73. I am not anti-national park, in fact I am a strong supporter of them. There are areas of Queensland like Fraser Island, Carnarvon Gorge, Great Sandy, Lamington etc that are so unique that they should be specifically managed and protected for their conservation values. However, by calling every bit of scrub you lock up a "national park" is actually taking away funding and focus on areas that are truly special. I am also against Governments taking productive land away from people for pure political expediency and then letting that area degrade, erode and then eventually combust in fire.

#### **Photos**

74. Sometimes photos speak louder than words. I have included in **Appendix 17** some photos of the fire and the devastation. They speak for themselves.

#### **Recommendations**

75. Winston Churchill once said: *"to improve is to change, to be perfect is to change often"*. These fires are an opportunity for us to change and change for the better. Some suggestions that the Committee might consider:
- i. Queensland needs a full parliamentary inquiry in to vegetation, fire and national park management;
  - ii. Any public policy debate must be science – facts based not ideologically driven;
  - iii. The best managers of the environment are those that live in it;
  - iv. Government agency's should assist land managers not be placed in positions to prevent them doing their jobs properly;
  - v. The width of fire breaks and management lines should be based on science not some arbitrary figure;

- vi. A full study into the environmental benefits of cattle grazing in national parks be instigated; and
- vii. Previous grazing leases converted to national park should be returned to rolling term leases with conservation status retained.

Thank-you for your consideration and I hope my submissions is of use to the Committee. I am available to appear in person or via telephone if the committee have any questions.

Yours faithfully,

Tom Marland on behalf of the Marland Family  
"Mt Wallaby"