



**SUBMISSION TO THE PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA -
JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON NORTHERN
AUSTRALIA**

FEBRUARY 2014

Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) is the peak body representing and uniting 16 of Queensland's rural industry organisations who work on behalf of primary producers across the state. QFF's mission is to secure a sustainable future for Queensland primary producers within a favourable social, economic and political environment by representing the common interests of its member organisations'. QFF's core business centres on resource security; water resources; environment and natural resources; industry development; economics; quarantine and trade.

Our goal is to secure a sustainable and profitable future for our members, as a core growth sector of the economy. Our members include:

- CANEGROWERS,
- Cotton Australia,
- Growcom,
- Nursery and Garden Industry Queensland,
- Queensland Aquaculture Industries Federation,
- Queensland Chicken Growers Association,
- Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation,
- Queensland Chicken Meat Council,
- Queensland United Egg Producers,
- Flower Association of Queensland Inc.,
- Pork Queensland Inc.,
- Australian Organic
- Fitzroy Food and Fibre Association,
- Pioneer Valley Water Co-operative Limited,
- Central Downs Irrigators Limited, and
- Burdekin River Irrigators Area Committee

Thank-you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia.

A viable and diverse agricultural industry already exists in Northern Australia. QFF **supports** the further development of Northern Australia in line with the following key points:

- 1. Lessons learned** – Northern Australia is well placed climatically and geographically to harness the potential for expansion and growth, transitioning extensive grazing regions to intensive farming operations, in a measured and considered way. Any plans for growth must learn from and avoid the mistakes of others in its continuing development, both with other northern Australia projects and from other regions. The inquiry must consider the plethora of historical and current research in the development of Northern Australia.
- 2. QLD Agriculture Strategy and Land Audit** – The Queensland Government has developed a strategy with the intent primarily around “growing” the Qld sector and doing so via strategic leadership and collaboration between Government and industry. Any development of Northern Australia requires consideration of this strategy. The Queensland Government has prepared an extensive analysis of the current state of play of agricultural development while also assessing its potential in its Land Audit. The Audit includes chapters on specific north Queensland regions.
- 3. Integration** – The QFF believes the success of further Northern Australia development will require integration of markets; supply chains, people and industry skills, biosecurity measures, flexible infrastructure, stable Government policy, particularly for international trade and environmental management, market-driven investment in research, development and extension for national and international arenas – delivered through an adaptive planning process capable of accepting and responding to input from all levels, including the historical and individual experience from current primary producers.
- 4. Market Access** - As our exports markets grow, Australia must continue to be mindful of the increasing competition from overseas markets – both for our export markets and our own domestic market. Australia has a highly productive and efficient farming system, but it is also among the most expensive to operate in the world. The Australian farming system also operates to very high environmental and sustainable standards, in line with community and government expectations, but not without cost. There is a crucial role for government and industry to educate consumers about the cost and value of Australian-produced food. Supporting Australian produce is ultimately a good outcome for local economies and also the environment, and greater initiatives for consumer education on this matter are needed. The further development of Northern Australia needs to engage and involve entire supply chains, and we actively need to facilitate growth in the export markets – it’s not just going to happen because we want it to.
- 5. Agriculture Planning Principles** – The inquiry must consider an adaptive planning process which includes planning instruments to support harmonious coexistence of agricultural, industrial and urban development. The QFF has developed Guiding Principles for Planning for Agriculture in Queensland; these are attached in Appendix 1.

General comments:

The challenges to northern agriculture are well known: these regions have to contend with an even more variable and hostile climate than other parts of the State; they lack the services and infrastructure available in other regions; and there is the chicken-and-egg problem of ensuring emerging industries have the necessary investment in processing facilities in order to be viable. To date, we have seen numerous attempts at development in the north in several regions, with varying degrees of success. Armed with this information and also the wealth of data already available, the Australian and State governments have a vital role to play in managing, guiding, and supporting any future development in this region to realise opportunities. Its role, if enacted properly, will help ensure that risks are minimised and opportunities are realised. When it comes to the agronomics of northern agricultural development, the scientific climate data and research is advancing to the point where we can fairly assess the potential and the risks of agriculture in the north and this data is pointing towards growth and opportunity. As stated above, we now need improved market integration to improve the potential beyond simply “growing the crop”. We need an improvement in market development and research opportunities to further drive the growth and prove the potential of the region. Industry is well aware of the “Asian food bowl” focus that is oft-quoted by governments, but a further sophistication of this strategy would be a welcome start to not only improve growth prospects for new regions, but also to increase the profitability of existing regions, many of which still have the potential for further growth.

More broadly, QFF believes there are significant opportunities to further support business and facilitate the careful strategic expansion of agriculture in Northern Australia. However, without the right mix of investment and stable Government policy, significant barriers and constraints may occur. The inquiry must acknowledge that Northern Australia includes large areas of Queensland where horticultural businesses are well established and major businesses are currently in operation and any development outside these areas which created over supply of product in the domestic market could not be supported.

QFF appreciates the opportunity to make a submission to the committee. QFF is committed to working with the Queensland and Australian Governments in the implementation of any new policy frameworks and related legislation in the development of Northern Australia. If you require further information, please contact QFF Sustainable Agriculture Policy Officer Adam Knapp on (07) 3837 4747.

END

APPENDIX 1: Guiding Principles for Planning for Agriculture

Guiding Principles for Planning for Agriculture in Queensland

THE CORE PRINCIPLES OF AGRICULTURAL PLANNING

1. **Recognise the importance of agriculture[#] to a sustainable regional economy and urban communities** by including references to agriculture in the vision and objectives of planning documents.
2. **Protect the natural resource base for agriculture[#]** by defining areas of agricultural land and other resources such as water important for local or specialised agricultural production and excluding incompatible land uses, particularly urban or rural-residential uses, mining and petroleum extraction and infrastructure corridors, from these areas.
3. **Avoid fragmentation of agricultural land and other pressures of urban growth** by setting appropriate lot sizes in agricultural areas consistent with the economics of local and regional production systems.
4. **Land use conflict**
 - a. **Avoid land use conflict and provide for compatible rural uses** by defining areas for agricultural production, particularly intensive animal industry* and intensive horticulture*, preventing the location of incompatible uses in and adjacent to agricultural production areas and where necessary requiring buffer areas between incompatible uses.
 - b. **Manage existing land use conflict** by giving preference to pre-existing lawful and lawfully operating agricultural land uses when dealing with complaints.
5. **Encourage sustainable land and water use and practices** by promoting agricultural production on suitable land and promoting sustainable land and water use practices.
6. **Encourage value-adding and diversification in agriculture[#]** by recognising the complexity and diversity of modern agricultural enterprises and providing for efficient development approval processes for small scale tourism activities and on-farm handling, processing and sale of agricultural produce.
7. **Provide and maintain adequate and efficient transport, energy and water infrastructure to support agriculture[#]** by identifying and planning for critical and strategic rural infrastructure that supports primary production and access to processing or supply chain services.
8. **Provide economic, employment and social support services for agriculture[#] in compact, self-contained rural towns and villages** by providing for the growth of these settlements within clearly defined urban boundaries.
9. **Protect the multiple values of agricultural land** by recognising the ecosystem services provided by and the attractiveness of agricultural production areas for tourism and avoid land use elements that would reduce these values.

[#] **Agriculture** - Any activity connected with the growing of food, fibre, timber and foliage including, but not limited to, cropping*, intensive horticulture*, animal husbandry*, intensive animal industry*, animal keeping*, aquaculture*, permanent plantation*, wholesale nursery*, production nursery, roadside stall*, winery* and rural industry*; and also including ancillary activities concerned with accommodation of farm workers, visitors and tourists; the storage of water; irrigation and drainage works; the storage of equipment for the production and transport of agricultural products; and the on-farm processing, packaging, storage and sale of agricultural products.

* Defined in the Queensland Planning Provisions under the *Sustainable Planning Act 2009*

Agricultural use definitions in the Queensland Planning Provisions Ver 3.0 under the Sustainable Planning Act 2009

Use	Definition	Examples
animal husbandry	Premises used for production of animals or animal products on either native or improved pastures or vegetation. The use includes ancillary yards, stables and temporary holding facilities and the repair and servicing of machinery.	cattle studs, grazing of livestock, non-feedlot dairying
animal keeping	Premises used for boarding, breeding or training of animals. The use may include ancillary temporary or permanent holding facilities on the same site and the ancillary repair and servicing of machinery.	aviaries, catteries, kennels, stables, wildlife refuge
aquaculture	Premises used for the cultivation of aquatic animals or plants in a confined area that may require the provision of food either mechanically or by hand.	pond farms, tank systems, hatcheries, raceway system, rack and line systems, sea cages
cropping	Premises used for growing plants or plant material for commercial purposes where dependant on the cultivation of soil. The use includes harvesting and the storage and packing of produce and plants grown on the site and the ancillary repair and servicing of machinery used on the site.	fruit, nut, vegetable and grain production, forestry for wood production, fodder and pasture production, plant fibre production, sugar cane growing, vineyard
intensive animal industry	Premises used for the intensive production of animals or animal products in an enclosure that requires the provision of food and water either mechanically or by hand. The use includes the ancillary storage and packing of feed and produce.	feedlots, piggeries, poultry and egg production
intensive horticulture	Premises used for the intensive production of plants or plant material on imported media and located within a building or structure or where outdoors, artificial lights or containers are used. The use includes the storage and packing of produce and plants grown on the subject site.	greenhouse and shade house plant production, hydroponic farms, mushroom farms
permanent plantation	Premises used for growing plants not intended to be harvested.	permanent plantations for carbon sequestration, biodiversity or natural resource management
roadside stall	Premises used for the roadside display and sale of goods in rural areas.	
rural industry	Premises used for storage, processing and packaging of products from a rural use. The use includes processing, packaging and sale of products produced as a result of a rural use where the processing and packaging is ancillary to a rural use on or adjacent to the site.	packing shed
wholesale nursery	Premises used for the sale of plants, but not to the general public, where the plants are grown on or adjacent to the site. The use may include sale of gardening materials where these are ancillary to the primary use.	
winery	Premises used for manufacturing and sale of wine manufactured on site.	
production nursery (not a QPP definition)	<i>Premises used for the growing and selling of plants, but not to the general public, where the plants are grown on or adjacent to the site</i>	