

Impact of the Australian Government's 2025 Environment Protection Reforms on Queensland

Submission

We own and operate a beef cattle and merino sheep enterprise on 264000 acres of unimproved red mulgalands/gidgea/Mitchell grass downs/rangeland. In those paddocks which contain mixed land types of red mulga country and black soil, and uneven grazing pressure over many years has seen biodiversity diminish and pasture species almost disappear from those black soil areas. We have fenced and strategically grazed some of those areas. Paddocks that started as this some years ago....



have now transformed to this....



We aren't finished though, there is still more areas to fence into land type so that we can better manage grazing pressure and allow for improved ground cover regeneration of an array of our native grasses and forbes, along with the coinciding increase in fauna.

We had started clearing the fenceline for our next area to fence but recent changes to the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act have left us wondering if these

new projects are going to result in a major headache for us sometime in the future if someone in a government office decides we haven't ticked the right boxes. Unfortunately we haven't yet been able to get clarity on what is allowed and what is not, and while using the Protected Matters Search Tool gives us some guidance, there is not a part of Australia that is not covered by the lighter pink tone which indicates where a 'protected matter' may occur, so we can self-assess while carrying out routine property management (like fencing to improve pasture condition and such new roads or watering points as may then be necessary) but with no assurance that at some point in the future we may be charged with some crime under the act. At the moment there is no encouragement to actively try to improve land condition. And in fact, due to the 15 year rule, people are clearing regrowth trees without needing to, specifically because they're worried about what they might not be able to do if those trees are standing for longer than 15 years.

Regarding fodder harvesting of mulga trees, which we do here when necessary in drought conditions, the most palatable and nutritionally valuable mulga trees are generally mature ones.

From preference, (due to time and fuel costs) we harvest using 2 dozers with a chain hooked between them to pull trees over so the cows can reach the leaves, and under current Qld legislation, we can only pull a maximum of 50m wide strips, leaving a minimum of 75m of standing trees. We can't stick rake or interfere with those trees in any way once they have been pulled, and can't touch them for drought fodder again for 10 years, so in theory we have a 5 year window in which to push or pull those trees over again, should drought conditions obligingly occur in that 5 year window. However, while mulga trees are extremely resilient and grow back more thickly after being disturbed, they take more than 10 – 15 years to mature into a tree that is going to be very useful as a drought fodder source.



These are mulga trees that have never been touched and as you can see, are useless as a drought fodder source in their current state due to the crown being too high for cattle to reach. You will also see that there is very limited vegetation growth under them. There's actually more ground cover than normal after nearly double our average annual rainfall last year. The ground normally looks a lot barer under mature mulga trees.



The mulga regrowth in the two photos above is now 7 – 8 years old. We pulled this area in 2018/2019 to drought feed cows. We've had some reasonably good years since then re rainfall. As a fodder source, they aren't carrying very much leaf yet, and what is there isn't very palatable, but as you can see, they do regenerate freely.

We also find that where we have pulled, the divots and hollows in the ground, combined with the lack of competition from the trees and the protection provided by the fallen tree branches encourages a tremendous variety of grass and forbes (along with associated fauna species) for a couple of years until the mulga seedlings and suckers start to take over again and choke them out.

Please bear in mind that a dry cow in drought conditions, relying largely on mulga leaf for substance, will need to consume about 10kg of leaf each day to maintain body weight.



The two photos above show mulga that was pulled in 2002/2003, obviously well outside the 15 year limit, and while tall, still not as valuable a fodder source as the more mature trees on page 2.



The seedlings in the photo to the left have grown in disturbed ground beside where we built a new fence. They are about 8 years old, and again, not yet big enough to be a useful fodder source.

With regard to fences, under the current Qld legislation, we can clear an internal fenceline to 10 metres wide, so once we build a fence down the middle of that, we have 5 metres either side. When we move our dozer, we have to move off the fenceline some distance, and walk the dozer over virgin trees, because it can't physically fit in the 5 metre space, and making the road along the fence another metre or two wider so it can fit means that we're breaking the law.

Please provide clarity on what is and is not allowed, especially with regard to routine property maintenance and pasture improvements.

Yours sincerely,

Pete and Wendy Sheehan