



Queensland Murray-Darling Committee Inc.'s Submission on the Draft State Planning Policy Protection of Queensland's strategic cropping land August 2011

30 September 2011

Submission to:

Strategic cropping land draft SPP
Land Planning
Land and Indigenous Services
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This submission is presented by the Chief Executive Officer, Geoff Penton, on behalf of the Queensland Murray-Darling Committee Inc. (QMDC). QMDC is a regional natural resource management (NRM) group that supports communities in the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin (QMDB) to sustainably manage their natural resources.

1.0 Urban expansion & demonstrated exceptional circumstances

When assessing urban expansion, it needs to be clear what is considered as relevant development and how the clause relating to “exceptional circumstances” will be applied. Urban expansion has historically been the main cause of reduction in good quality agricultural land in the QMDB region. This is unlikely to change given the increasing population of both Southeast and Southern Queensland.

QMDC would like to see included within the government's legislative and planning tools framework an education/awareness programme for the urban development industry that clearly outlines what planning outcomes are sought to honour the intent of the SCL policy.

QMDC supports a strong statement and direction articulated by the SPP that requires planning schemes such as the Toowoomba Regional Council Strategic Plan, Surat Basin Development Plan and other relevant state and local government plans and the associated development approval processes to consider alternatives to urban expansion on SCL.

Proactive communication needs to occur so that building and development companies are clear about planning policies and the intent of the SPP and the State Planning Policy 1/92 *Development and Conservation of Good Quality Agricultural Land* (SPP 1/92) in order to encourage alternatives to development on SCL.

SCL Policy

Submission



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2.0 Operation in tandem with SPP 1/92

QMDC supports the operation of the SPP in tandem with the SPP 1/92 provided the level of assessment is consistent with the methodologies adopted in SPP 1/92.

3.0 Outcomes sought by SPP

QMDC supports the outcomes sought by the SPP.

QMDC however submits that the word 'conserved' in section 1.1 (p.2) '*conserved and managed for the longer term*' needs to be clearly defined and included in the glossary.

4.0 Area to which the SPP applies

The area of *non-SCL land within 1 kilometre of land identified as SCL* referred to in section 2.9 (p.3) needs to be measured according to impacts caused by a development and its activities on SCL, for example dust from vehicle use or coal, noise from plant operations etc. Buffer zones should be determined by the types of industry and distances need to be determined according to impact of that industry, for example a buffer zone between a coal mine on the western side of SCL would need to be greater than the eastern side because of the prevailing westerly winds. The creation of buffer zones to protect waterways needs to be considered against stream orders and aquifer integrity. The need to protect water quality and quantity is an essential consideration if strategic cropping land is to be protected, conserved and managed.

5.0 Development to which the SPP does not apply

QMDC asserts that all SCL should be protected. Section 2.11 (p.3) appears to undermine the total protection that should be promoted by the SPP. If the intent of the policy is to protect SCL and future food production, any development that compromises that productivity and as a result requires that the impacts be mitigated, is unacceptable. Financial contributions (compensation) cannot buy or create more of a finite resource. Nor can money replace future food supplies. We can't eat money!!

6.0 Development to which the SPP applies

QMDC asserts that the nominated 5 hectares minimum in section 2.11 (p3) will result in loss of SCL through material change of use in development sites less than 5 hectares. These areas are likely to be significant in quantity and the overall impact on SCL and adjoining uses. A likely outcome is a fragmented landscape.

7.0 Making or amending a planning instrument

QMDC generally supports sections 3.1 and 3.2 (p.5) but is concerned by the references to minimum lot sizes in subsections 3.1 (vii) and 3.2 (vi), for example, planning instruments should be reflective of wider landscape values so that fragmentation is avoided. See above comments also.

Please see discussion above on buffer zones in relation to *sensitive land use* in section 3.1 (p.5) and definition at p.17.



8.0 Achieving the SPP outcomes through development assessment in Strategic Cropping Protection Areas

QMDC recommends including the following to section 4.3 (i) (p.6) “...and does not contribute to the permanent alienation **or diminished productivity** of land identified as SCL”.

QMDC has repeatedly suggested a 50 year timeframe is too long as per section 4.3 (ii) (b) (p.6) and Annex 2 (p.14) and is therefore not an appropriate measure of time for the following reasons:

- The average age of landholders is 59 years however average length of land ownership (as per 2006 census) is 15 years
- A generation is considered 25 years
- Most State Government planning cycles are 5 years – some for example Water Plans are 10 -15 years at the most
- Delbessie Lease renewals are done to 30 years.

A 50 year timeframe therefore does not mirror key factors that address land use impacts and restoration of SCL.

QMDC does not supports section 4.8 (iv) (p.6) and recommends that 100ha is too large an area. All SCL should be protected and there should be no minimum area assigned to that protection.

9.0 Achieving the SPP outcomes through development assessment in the Strategic Cropping Management Areas

QMDC recommends including the following to section 4.15 (i) (p.7) “...and does not contribute to the permanent alienation **or diminished productivity** of land identified as SCL”.

QMDC offers the same comment made above with regards to the 50 year timeframe being too long with regards to section 4.15 (ii) (b) (p.7).

QMDC does not supports section 4.21 (iv) (p.8) and recommends that 100ha is too large an area.

10.0 Glossary

Exceptional circumstance: QMDC is concerned that crucial definitions have yet to be determined by the proposed SPP and that these are to be defined once legislation is proposed. This denies important contribution by key stakeholders and the region’s communities to key terms integral to the SPP.

Agriculture: QMDC seeks a clear definition to be added to the glossary as to what rural activities are included in the SPP under this term.

11.0 General comments

The aim of SCL policy should be to provide certainty to all parties. QMDC submits that the SPP should not necessitate the commissioning of expensive consultants to prove or disprove SCL criteria are met. QMDC also argues that protracted legal arguments over conflicting scientific and/or technical assessments should be anticipated by the SPP and negated by providing a high level of certainty.

Acknowledging the global context of food security is critical to the process of identifying and protecting SCL. QMDC remains concerned that the current approach fails to recognise a growing world population with rising demands for food and the worldwide loss of arable land. Furthermore, there is a need to acknowledge changing climate patterns, increasing climate variability and their implications for future food production. This suggests SCL needs to be identified and protected in all climatic zones, not merely the central and southern protection zones as indicated on the SCL mapping.