

23 June 2009

Consultation on Policy Options

Endangered regrowth vegetation management in the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin (QMDB)

The Queensland Murray-Darling Basin is subject to the *Vegetation Management (Regrowth Clearing Moratorium) Act 2009*. The Queensland Murray-Darling Committee (QMDC) Executive Committee is drafting a policy to provide the basis for a consistent response to regrowth vegetation management issues within the Basin.

Endangered regrowth vegetation is important to landscape function, salinity risk abatement, increasing the extent of native vegetation coverage in the landscape, and has numerous social, cultural and economic values as well as environmental values.

QMDC wants its landholder, community and organisational stakeholders to help develop this policy response to regrowth vegetation management in the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin.

A draft is available online at www.qmdc.org.au. Hopefully, when finalised, this document will be used not just by QMDC but also other organisations as the region addresses the issues surrounding regrowth vegetation management across the Basin.

The policy will provide a framework for the decision-making, risk management and response to the specific impacts on natural resources. It will ensure a consistent and robust position when working with communities, industry organisations, local government and state government on regrowth vegetation matters.

Please review our first draft policy document and forward your comments and suggestions by the end of August 2009. Liz Todd, Policy and Planning Officer with QMDC, is available to discuss the policy with individuals or groups, or attend meetings at request, to enhance opportunities for meaningful consultation. Further information with regard to QMDC vegetation management is also available on our website (www.qmdc.org.au).

We look forward to your input into a policy addressing regrowth vegetation management and its contribution to the region's natural resources.

Regards,

Peter Blundell
Chairman
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Endangered regrowth vegetation management in the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin (QMDB)

QMDC DRAFT Policy Options for Consultation
3 July 2009

Recommendations:

1. That the QMDC Executive Committee reviews for consultation the
 - Endangered Regrowth Vegetation Policy
2. That the QMDC Executive Committee considers the proposed
 - Principles and Mechanisms; and
 - Is supportive of QMDC to pursue the delivery of these actions with the intention of influencing landholders, government and other stakeholders as a means of addressing the policy and principles.

For further information and submissions to this draft contact:

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Policy Context

The Queensland Murray-Darling Basin is subject to the *Vegetation Management (Regrowth Clearing Moratorium) Act 2009*. This legislation restricts the clearing of endangered regrowth vegetation for a period of at least three months (from 8 April 2009). During this time the State Government is consulting with stakeholders about the optimum way to regulate clearing of regrowth vegetation under the *Vegetation Management Act 1999*.

The Queensland Murray-Darling Committee Inc. provided a submission to the Queensland Government on the *Vegetation Management (Regrowth Clearing Moratorium) Act 2009*. This submission was based on the draft policy document presented to the QMDC Executive Committee 5 May 2009.

Following is a summary of the hectares of endangered regrowth vegetation presented at the catchment and shire scale across the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin.

Catchment	Sum of Hectares
Balonne-Condamine	296,570
Border Rivers	169,198
Moonie	51,757
Warrego	22,069
Grand Total	539,594

Shire	Sum Of Hectares
Balonne Shire	144,011
Blackall Tambo Regional	1,962
Dalby Regional	71,922
Goondiwindi Regional	146,011
Murweh Shire	17,768
Paroo Shire	25
Roma Regional	113,670
South Burnett Regional	1,683
Southern Downs Regional	23,755
Toowoomba Regional	18,787
Grand Total	539,594

Context Question: What are the potential issues associated with legislative restriction of clearing endangered regrowth vegetation?

Issue identification

Item	Positive	Negative
<i>Resource Condition Targets</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased extent of endangered regrowth vegetation coverage to achieve RCT 4 Increased retention of regrowth for landscape function and value Salinity risk abatement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not of concern and of concern regrowth vegetation at higher risk of clearing Condition and ecological health of native vegetation at risk due to change in attitude to management Non planned approach to landscape function and value of endangered regrowth vegetation Threatening processes at risk of not being managed
<i>Practice</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing PMAV supported Long term potential for management of regrowth vegetation Opportunity to promote best management practice and provide incentives for actively managing regrowth Opportunity to pursue regional and sub-catchment planning of endangered regrowth management, including coordination of permits for management of threatening processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legislation only achieves minimum standard, not best management practices for regrowth vegetation Potential no further voluntary retention of not of concern and of concern regrowth vegetation Permits now required for active management of threatening processes (weed, pests, fire, thickening) Loss of economic opportunities, which may have included retention and management of vegetation
<i>Attitude</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Value adding to regrowth already voluntarily managed for landscape and ecological value and function Opportunity for education on values and purpose/intent of legislation ie to protect values and function of endangered regrowth vegetation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Landholder distrust of government Panic clearing of other regrowth vegetation from fear of further tightening of legislation Non consultative with landholders Potential no willingness to participate in voluntary vegetation management and planning

Policy position

In response to the *Vegetation Management (Regrowth Clearing Moratorium) Act 2009*, QMDC submits that:

1. The purpose of this Act would be optimally achieved by regulating clearing through a Regional Vegetation Management Planning process.
2. Restricting clearing of endangered regrowth vegetation without consultation or consideration of regionally relevant issues will undermine the intent of the *Vegetation Management Act 1999*.

QMDC supports a range of principles and mechanisms (planning, education, incentive and legislative) to manage regrowth vegetation at a regional scale.

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Principles

Regional Natural Resource Management Plan

1. Regrowth management in the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin is based on the Resource Condition Targets (Regional NRM Plan, revised targets 2006).

VB RCT3 By 2020, there is a ten percent increase in area of sustainably managed native vegetation for landscape and biodiversity outcomes through traditional and innovative economic uses, based on representative areas.

VB RCT4 By 2020, the extent of 'endangered' regional ecosystems across catchments with less than 30 percent remnant vegetation will be increased by ten percent of the 2001 mapped extent.

VB RCT6 By 2010, areas of identified high nature conservation significance are maintained in current condition and improved against Common Nature Conservation Classification System 2003/2004 survey benchmarks.

VB RCT8 By 2020, the biodiversity condition and ecological health of ten percent of the area of native vegetation in priority catchments are maintained or improved as measured against baseline conditions to be set by 2008.

2. Endangered regrowth vegetation is important to landscape function (including native vegetation coverage, ecosystem linkages, ecological processes and biodiversity condition) and salinity risk abatement in the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin, even though it is not recognised as remnant vegetation, in a way that achieves sub-catchment planning at a landscape scale.
3. Retention and management of endangered regrowth vegetation is critical to increasing the extent of native vegetation coverage, especially in heavily-cleared landscapes, to achieve the Regional NRM Plan Resource Condition Targets, in particular RCT 4.
4. Environmental, social, cultural and economic values of endangered regrowth vegetation must be protected and sustained.

Best Management Practices

5. Best management practices for endangered regrowth vegetation for the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin includes:
 - a. Appropriate planning and design in the landscape, at the bioregion, regional, sub-catchment and property scale; and
 - b. Actively managing threatening processes.

Mechanisms

Regional Vegetation Management Plans

The Queensland Murray-Darling Committee supports the regulation of clearing of endangered regrowth vegetation through Regional Vegetation Management Plans or a similar process and intent.

QMDC seeks a process where Regional Vegetation Management Plans (RVMP) are developed in partnership with the community and government and considered for advice and adoption by the Minister.

The function of the Regional Vegetation Management Plans is to include modifications to departmental policy as well as strategies for action to protect biodiversity, avoid land degradation and maintain or enhance rural productivity. QMDC seeks modifications through the Regional Vegetation Management Planning process to include:

- Development of regionally relevant assessment codes for clearing approvals to suit local issues and priorities, consistent with the intent of the legislation
- Identification of local best practice for management of all vegetation, including regrowth
- Identification of strategies and actions that achieve outcomes that recognise the social, environmental and economic aspects of vegetation management
- Identification of appropriate incentives that recognise and encourage existing good practice
- Identification of areas of high nature conservation value, and areas vulnerable to land degradation
- Identification of opportunities for social and economic benefit through better vegetation management practices on both state and privately owned land
- Development of specialist codes of practice for activities such as sustainable forestry, woody weed management and fodder harvesting
- Determination of suitable timeframes for permit approvals and for reviewing plans and assessment codes, and
- Development of appropriate and equitable methods for application of financial incentives and other forms of support for 'public good' vegetation management.

Planning

- The overall achievement of the Regional Vegetation Management Plan is to be consistent with and delivers against the Vegetation and Biodiversity Resource Condition Targets in the Regional Natural Resource Management Plan (QMDC, 2004).
- Planning activities are recognised at the bio-region, region, catchment, sub-catchment, property and species levels and are supported through the planning process.
- Property vegetation management planning activities foster landscape or sub-catchment scale outcomes.
- Vegetation reconfiguration proposals should be assessed across property boundaries within the same sub-catchment as part of a community landscape planning process.
- Property Maps of Assessable Vegetation (PMAV) are recognised at all planning levels.
- Catchment and sub-catchment plans developed in partnership with landholders for all areas in the bio-region identify priority areas allow for “trading” and achieve a no net loss (overall biodiversity value) outcome, with clear guidelines/rules for trading defined.
- The plan/regulations should allow for the reconfiguration of retention areas on individual properties, aggregations or in sub-catchments.
- Landholders can develop plans for remnant, non remnant, regrowth, deep rooted native vegetation or plantations for inclusion in property vegetation management plans.
- The plan/regulations should provide for situations where a landholder may offer to retain areas of non remnant or regrowth vegetation in exchange for areas of remnant vegetation, on the basis of better or equal achievement of the purposes ie salinity prevention, biodiversity and overall regional ecosystem extent.
- Areas of salinity risk and less productive or poorer land systems (shallow, stony) are identified as priority areas to revert back to remnant vegetation and considered as part of overall sub-catchment vegetation assessments.
- Recovery plans for all endangered, vulnerable or rare flora and fauna species in the region are developed through several means including sub-catchment plans.

Threatening processes

Planning activities at all levels should address threatening processes including:

- Retention and management of vegetation in priority salinity risk areas including critical recharge and discharge areas.
- Rehabilitation activities in existing salinity discharge areas and scalded areas.
- Management of erosion, monoculture and encroachment through thinning activities.
- Management of invasive plants and invasive animals through activities, including the use of thinning, fire and grazing pressure.
- Management of threatening processes associated with habitat fragmentation through addressing patches linkages and edge to area ratios.
- Threatening processes are addressed by local best management practices and provisions are made for the undertaking of such management activities, whereby threatening processes include:
 - Thickening/encroachment
 - Habitat fragmentation
 - Monoculture
 - Erosion
 - Harboured of invasive plants
 - Harboured of invasive animals
 - Climate change
 - Nutrient rundown
 - Fire
 - Biodiversity loss

Incentives

QMDC supports the need for a range of incentive mechanisms for the retention and management of vegetation. Incentives could be provided and determined through the Regional Vegetation Management Planning process, including market-based, financial, technical and social incentives.

- Environmental stewardship program is promoted on a district/sub-catchment scale.
- Enterprise diversification programs developed and implemented to promote the most sustainable use of the region's natural resources, e.g. farm forestry.
- Economic advice is available to assist in the planning stage for optimising (not maximising) farm gross margins.
- Incentive schemes and financial assistance packages linked to accreditation schemes such as Environmental Management Systems (EMS) that promote and encourage ecologically sustainable management practices.
- Voluntary nature conservation agreements, including use of statutory covenants, accessible to landholders across the bioregion for protection of areas of high nature conservation values.

Incentives should address public benefit and burden.

- Incentive schemes assist landholders to manage their properties as a business enterprise as well as managing areas for public benefit outcomes.
- Incentive mechanisms address real costs incurred or loss of production and opportunity such as management, monitoring, retirement of land, loss of market value and any other costs.
- Funding for targeted investment for landholders adversely affected by the retention of vegetation principally for public good.
- State legislation should not remove the tradability and fungibility of property rights of the landholder with respect to the current, prospective and/or future carbon offset/credit values associated with regrowth vegetation.

Education and extension

QMDC plays a strong role in providing education and extension opportunities for the planning and management of vegetation in the region. This role, and similar roles of government departments and other non government organisations should be recognised and supported.

Education opportunities promote and create awareness of the values of endangered regrowth vegetation. Extension of management guidelines at the sub-catchment and property level should be supported, including:

- Extension and training opportunities developed and implemented for whole of property planning and sub-catchment planning.
- Management guidelines developed and extended for areas of significant biodiversity value including riparian areas, wetlands, lakes and springs, high nature conservation regional ecosystems and important wildlife habitat areas.
- Extension of sustainable grazing management programs including total grazing pressure.
- Encourage landholders who have low vegetation retention rates (eg less than 20%) to restore and retain vegetation through voluntary participation.
- Endangered regional ecosystem extent increased through voluntary protection and management of regrowth.
- Of concern regional ecosystem extent increased to greater than 30% of pre clearing extent through voluntary protection and management of regrowth.