

The [Australian Banana Growers' Council](#) (ABGC) has voiced concerns over a proposal by the local Queensland Government to implement additional regulations to better protect the Great Barrier Reef.

The ABGC said the new policies could 'devastate' its industry by regulating the land they already own.

It would classify new horticultural development - on both current and future banana farms - as a new [Agricultural Environmentally Relevant Activity](#) (ERA), requiring farmers to implement "expensive and impractical measures".

The provisions fail to take into account location, landscape or climatic conditions, the ABGC adds.

It is the ABGC's firm belief that they would not only have a negative impact on banana growing, but fail to do anything further for the Reef.

"Though we have tried to communicate this to the Queensland Government both in writing and face-to-face, it would appear that our views on the development of current grazing land in North Queensland are either not understood or are simply being ignored," ABGC chair Stephen Lowe says.

"The Government's proposal is to restrict new horticultural development on land that has not had horticulture or other crops on it three years out of the last 10, with at least one of these in the last five years.

"This proposal to make horticultural production an Environmentally Relevant Activity (an ERA) would restrict future horticultural development and sends the wrong message to our rural communities. It shows the Queensland Government is not supporting future rural economic development."

If introduced, the ABGC has told the government the provisions would result in serious profitability and sustainability issues on grazing land within existing banana farms and on other land that has been bought for the production of bananas or other horticulture.

On top of that, they would hinder future innovation and diversification in the banana industry that directly and indirectly supports 18,000 jobs in North Queensland and has a flow-on value of AUD\$1.2 billion (US\$844 million), says the council.

The ABGC notes that it understands and welcomes the need for measures to protect the

Great Barrier Reef. The banana industry has worked closely with the Department of Environment and Science on proposed minimum sediment and nutrient standards and has a range of initiatives in place to improve farm practices and water quality, it adds.

The ABGC suggests that, instead of the proposed ERA, the new minimum nutrient and sediment standards be applied to all existing freehold land, regardless of whether it has previously been developed for horticulture.

No matter the parcel of land or its history, the ABGC comments that this approach will best complement existing Best Management Practice farming systems.

This is the best way to achieve the desired result of no net decline in the quality of water entering the Great Barrier Reef, it emphasizes.

“The proposed ERA simply seems to ignore the realities of farming – be it varying climates, the fact that most banana growers have diversified to combat natural disasters and disease, or even just the longterm planning involved in keeping a farming business afloat,” Lowe says.

“I know many growers would happily welcome representatives onto their farms to demonstrate the very real ways decisions like this could affect farming into the future.”