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## **Protecting the reef, or confusing and frustrating our farmers?**

January 1, 2010 marks the beginning of a new decade, but also marks the start of inappropriate and ineffective regulations for Queensland farmers. Many farmers using agricultural chemicals in Queensland will be required to comply with new regulations designed to protect the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) from agricultural chemical runoff. Unfortunately, despite significant efforts by farming associations and CropLife Australia to significantly reduce the regulatory burden upon users, the Bligh Labor government continues to implement requirements that will ultimately prove to be expensive and ineffectual.

All cane farmers and cattle graziers in the Burdekin Dry Tropics, Mackay Whitsunday or Wet Tropics catchments will now have to keep a record each time they use any agricultural chemical on their crops. This involves filling out forms that can exceed six pages for each chemical application. In contrast to government statements to the contrary, these records are likely to need to be submitted and examined by the government.

The new regulations attempt to protect the GBR from agricultural chemicals that can run - off from farms into streams that ultimately feed into the reef's lagoon. However, many of the new requirements are targeted at minimising the risk of chemicals drifting away from crops after being sprayed. In contrast to agricultural run-off, this process does not threaten the reef, yet has been drawn into a regulatory approach designed to protect the reef. Indeed the scientific justification for greater regulation is still questionable, with the "high levels found at the GBR" not actually detected at the reef, but rather at sites near river mouths that drain agricultural land.

Rather than working with farmers to improve farm practices, the Bligh government has brought out the big stick of regulation to require change.

The new regulations are overly complicated, making compliance by farmers difficult. This will merely result in increased administration and farming costs, as well as a farming community that is more resentful and unwilling to cooperate as government continue to create more and more red tape.

Users of agricultural chemicals need to ensure that they are using chemicals safely and effectively to protect human health and that of the environment, including the GBR. By complying with the existing instructions on the labels that show how agricultural chemicals can be safely used, farmers can do this.

Unfortunately, in Queensland the Bligh Labor government seems to think that farmers could spend their time more effectively by filling out forms.

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