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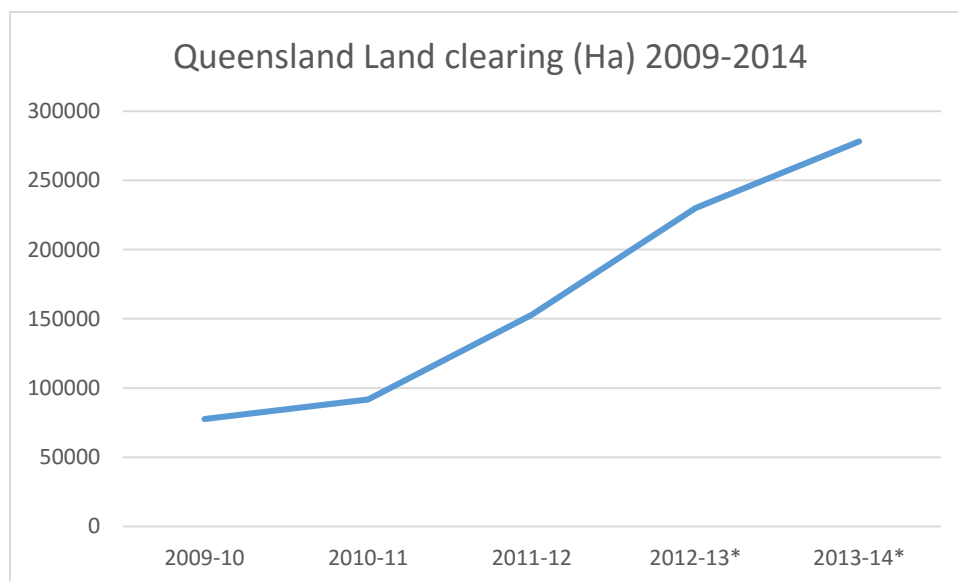
**Submission to the Agriculture and Environment Parliamentary Committee on the Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016**

**I would like to make the following submission to the committee considering this Bill:**

In view of the State Government's \$35 million annual commitment to the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan I found it disturbing that the 2015 Queensland Auditor General Report into the program found that

*'Preliminary results from the vegetation management programs indicate a rise in woody vegetation clearing rates over the last four years in reef catchments. Increases in tree clearing rates may contribute to increased soil erosion. This result is counter-productive as it increases the risk of run-off. It also has the potential to contradict the Reef Plan targets of no net loss of natural wetlands and an increase in riparian vegetation.'*

This statement somewhat understates the problem, as shown in the figure below.



**Source:**

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-06-16/land-clearing-soars-in-queensland-leaked-figures-show/6550622>

What the Auditor General does not actually state here is that it also represents a wanton waste of public money, as allowing this clearing more than undoes any hard-won gains that the annual \$32 million of taxpayer's money might have done to improve Reef water quality.

There is no doubt that this is mostly due to the Campbell Newman Government's dismantling of the Vegetation Management Act. As a representative on one of the committees that negotiated the original Tree Clearing Guidelines for this Act, I can testify to the huge amounts of time, effort and no doubt public money, that went into developing these guidelines as something that all of the representatives who participated in the process could live with.

The dismantling of the Vegetation Management Act has been disastrous, at a critical time for the Great Barrier Reef. Due to intensifying weather patterns influenced by climate change, the Reef has been hit with seven category 3+ cyclones, extreme floods and four coral bleaching events (including the current one which is already the worst ever seen and is ongoing), since 2005. Reef water quality is critical to the Reef's ability to withstand these events. The Queensland Government does not seem to understand the fragility of its tourism sector, with an estimated \$5.2 billion in income and about 64,000 FTE jobs dependant on Great Barrier Reef tourism (*Deloitte Access Economics, Economic Contribution of the Great Barrier Reef, 2013*). These jobs are at risk if we continue to milk the Reef as a cash cow and make no concerted attempt to address the one threat to the Reef that we have immediate control over: the amount of land-based runoff we allow to enter Reef catchments. Maintenance of vegetation cover is key to managing this runoff. Without the Great Barrier Reef, Queensland Tourism has little to offer that cannot be seen elsewhere, for cheaper costs and less distance travelled. Without Reef tourism and its ancillary industries, who will employ all of these people in regional towns?

As a Landcare volunteer I can attest to the difficulty and expense involved in restoring vegetation communities once they are degraded or removed; it is far more economical and effective to protect what we already have.

Of course this does not even begin to consider the millions of tonnes of CO2 emissions from the increased land clearing, which add to the climate change effects already threatening not only the Reef but the human habitability of Queensland. The idea of contributing willingly to the process that brings the likelihood of more flood events like 2011 and more cyclones like Yasi beggars belief. For a mainly coastal population, the mitigation and recovery costs of sea level rise and increased frequency and/or severity of such events will impoverish Queensland, as we saw after the floods in 2011. Of the many sectors that have a lot to lose with rising CO2 levels, tourism and agriculture, the biggest long-term employers in regional Queensland, stand out. Allowing this rampant destruction of vegetation to happen is no less than a negligent disregard for the future of all Queenslanders.

Australia already has a world leading track record in species extinctions and the rate of land clearing in Queensland is making a major contribution to this habitat and species loss. There is no point spending money on threatened species programs with one hand if you allow hundreds of thousands of hectares of habitat to be removed at the same time.

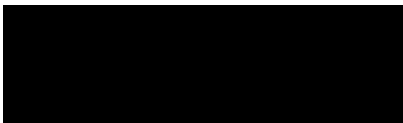
I would like to submit that the Government pass this Bill without delay as so much irreparable damage has been done already and there is no time to waste.

This Bill will address the problems facing us because it:

1. Removes the ability to get a permit to clear for so-called High Value Agriculture, and will thus stop large-scale clearing of remnant woodlands.

2. Restores protections for ecologically important regrowing woodlands ('High Value Regrowth') on freehold and Aboriginal land.
3. Restores protections for trees next to riverbanks ('riparian areas') and extends the provisions from some to all Great Barrier Reef catchments.
4. Removes the defence of claimed mistaken clearing, and restores the *starting* presumption that a landholder is responsible for clearing that takes place on their property.
5. It makes much of the prospective legislation retrospective to 17 March, in an attempt to deter panic clearing and panic applications.

Thank-you for the opportunity to make a submission,  
Yours sincerely,

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Jacquie Sheils