

E A Hobson

Theodore Q 4719  
ph

Research Director  
Agriculture and Environment Committee  
Parliament House  
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Madam/Sir,

**re: Support for proposed amendments to tree clearing laws**

Having observed the clearing of the Brigalow belt and the resultant land degradation and damage to the Reef, I consider the clearing of native vegetation to have been one of the most disastrous effects of so called 'development' in Central Queensland.

Birds, such as the Plain Turkey (Australian Bustard) once numerous in this area, are now rarely seen. Noisy Miners, Indian Mynahs and Galahs, among others have benefited and forced out many smaller birds dependent on the understory habitats of natural bushland.

Softwood scrub trees were cleared in the early 1950's in the Theodore District to be replaced by grassy biological deserts of buffel grass which now fuel fires too intense for remaining scrub trees, steadily clearing remnant patches. Where overgrazing and poor stock management follows, gullyng now carries huge loads of silt during flood events out the mouth of the Fitzroy and north into the corals of the Whitsundays. Where cultivation follows, huge costs are involved if farmers are to keep the topsoil on their properties.

I have heard landowners laughing about 'lightning strikes' – the cover story sometimes used to avoid responsibility for ecologically damaging fires intentionally lit. For those who think their interests lie in clearing vegetation, loopholes such as those introduced by the recent LNP government will be fully exploited. Land owners pride themselves on being independent and knowing what is best for the land, so they must also accept responsibility for what happens on their properties. There are operators who help land owners to prepare plans that will avoid prosecution for their tree-clearing behaviours.

I am therefore in favour of tightening the law to make landholders responsible for any clearing or for fires that clear trees or regrowth illegally on their land. Their fire management plan should take into consideration the potential risk to that vegetation and steps be taken to prevent unintended clearing.

With all this in mind, it is in horror that I see the resumption of broad-scale tree-clearing in Queensland following the changes made by the LNP. Calls for the 'development' of Northern Australia for Agriculture when we are still struggling to remedy the damage caused by irrigation and farming development schemes, seems madness to me. Those soils under the northern rainfall patterns are even more fragile than those of the Brigalow belt, and clearing them will almost certainly acidify the Gulf of Carpentaria as well as adding extra load to the northern reef.

On top of this, it is clear that tree clearing releases CO2 which is a significant factor in global climate change, and will nullify any agreement made to limit our greenhouse gas emissions.

The proposed changes make good sense to me. There is plenty of cleared land that is under-productive because of lazy management practices. Let corporations and government invest in protecting and enhancing the productivity of existing cleared land rather than in clearing more.

Hence I support the removal of the exemption from clearing of high value agricultural land. Australians are not starving for food or money. No damage will be done by protecting such land from clearing, and in fact, I would suggest that land managers who protect such land for ecological reasons should be financially supported in doing so – putting a public value on what a farmer may regard as 'useless land'.


I support the protection of ecologically important regrowing woodlands ('High Value Regrowth') on freehold and Aboriginal land. I hope this also extends to roadsides where recent indiscriminate Highway clearing has destroyed a regrowing fringe of endangered woodland just outside my property.

When I recently was flown over the Dawson Valley, compared with fifty years ago, I noted that the few remaining belts of trees are along roadsides and streams. To remove the old growth trees with their nesting hollows along the streams will reduce biodiversity and force populations of native animals on to ever decreasing habitats with the imbalance creating disease and parasitic pressures on those trees remaining. Mistletoe is now rampant in and stressing the trees along our roadsides. I am therefore in favour of protecting remnants on all public and aboriginal lands, in riparian zones and in all catchments.

Given the destructive and uneconomical panic clearing that preceded the enactment of the Beattie government's laws, making the law retrospective the date of its announcement is the only way to stop anxious managers from panicking into destructive behaviour and clearing land they will not later be able to keep from regrowing.

I commend the current Government on tackling this issue, and I suggest that the best way to make these measures more palatable is to use taxation on huge agricultural corporations to fund assistance to land managers who protect habitat in a responsible manner.

Yours faithfully,  
Elizabeth A Hobson

  
Theodore, Q 4719