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Agriculture and Environment Committee  
Parliament House  
BRISBANE QLD 4000  
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Dear Chair and Committee Members

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

**The Present Tree clearing legislation and how it has affected the koala in the wild and our critical care organisation which specialises in the rescue, rehabilitation and release of these animals.**

**Return to the Wild incorporation**, a not for profit organisation specialising in the rescue care rehabilitation and release back to the wild of the vulnerable koala and other wildlife species. We abide by the rules and regulations set out by Qld Government Department of Environment and Heritage.

We rescue these animals at our own expense and time and after rescue transfer the injured or diseased animal to a specialist vet at either Sunshine coast or Brisbane. This may take a full day in rescue and transport alone, is expensive and time consuming.

Care of the animal after veterinary treatment is extensive, with medication, formula, daily leaf cutting, being both labour intensive and financially exhausting.

As the law requires all koalas must be released back to the area they were found i.e. within 1 km and not more than 5, unless that land is cleared and then a permit must be sought to relocate the animal to nearest suitable habitat.

As the majority of land that the koala inhabits is privately owned, except for road verges this is limiting the koala's long term survival in the wild. As previously stated the Government code of practice the Wildlife Rehabilitation permit holder is required to release the rehabilitated animal back to where it came from. If land owners continue to clear the land there is no point in rehabilitating any wildlife for release to the wild.

Since the present restrictions on land clearing act has been changed, the number of animals requiring rescue has increased. Noticeably on the Darling Downs area. As well as large areas of land clearing, small acre felling has become widespread, even small holdings with only a few acres to several hundred have been seen clearing and burning of the felled and pushed timber. This may not seem significant, but the koalas habitat is already restricted and even the removal of a few trees in once area could be the death sentence for this animal.

In the vicinity of these clearings there have been dramatic increases in displaced koalas who have been hit by vehicles, savaged by dogs and tossed by cattle, and koalas with burnt or inhalation damage due to these burn offs, as well as increases in diseases and even starvation. (Our records are sent to Department of Environment).

Some of the rescues we have noticed with clearing in the areas are stress related diseases, poor body condition, as well as the animal coming to the ground trying to find suitable trees to shelter or feed from. **Without the tree the koala WILL not survive.**

Under previous government legislation many of the land was listed as remnant vegetation and not to be cleared.

The present legislation allows “self-management” for the land owner to clear this land. None of the cleared properties had either sought permission from Department of Environment nor had “spotter catchers” to assess or protect the wildlife prior to their clearing.

Recently a 600 acre privately owned property in Brazier & Evans Rd Kleinton, which had parts of remnant vegetation and a known koala habitat was burnt, without any legislation protecting the wildlife in either ‘staggered burning’ or in having a spotter catcher present. A koala was seen in a tree with the base burning. Reporting this incident to both the Department of Environment and RSPCA has had no results. Legislation also needs to be changed in this practice to ensure ‘staggered’ burning will protect the wildlife giving it a chance to move and with spotter catcher assessors prior and during these processes. This property is marked for full scale development, which would not have been allowed under previous legislation.

**Unless the legislation is changed to protect our vulnerable koala and other species we WILL LOSE THE KOALA IN THE WILD.**

It will be too late when the koala disappears from the wild to change legislation, already we have noticed a huge change in the climate and this has affected the quality of the foliage we have to collect to feed the in care koalas.

As has happened with the bleaching of the coral in the Great Barrier Reef, once the damage has been done it is too late to turn back the clock.

Climate change has already made a difference to the temperatures, weather patterns, and it is apparent that the quality of vegetation and habitat suitable for the koala and indeed all species is being affected.

The koala is mentioned as it is an ambassador for all species, if the habitat of this one species is protected, then all the neighbouring arboreal species and even terrestrial species will be protected.

We need the present legislation to be changed to protect the habitat not only for the koala as a species but to protect what is left of our climate for all before it is too late.

It is urgently requested that the legislation is changed to bring back the bill to protect our wild habitat and restrict land clearing and protect the riparian areas, as well as the staggered and controlled burn off of private land.

We would like the opportunity to appear before the Committee in their hearing into this enquiry

I am authorised by Return to the Wild incorporation as President/Director to write this submission.

[REDACTED]

Clare Gover  
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***Return to the Wild inc.,***

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