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Dear Chair and Committee Members

Submission: I strongly support the Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016

My support for this Bill: I support this Bill that reinstates the original conservation protections of 1999, essential for preservation of environmental diversity and wildlife habitat. I am writing this submission as an individual and opinions reflect my own personal viewpoint. I also endorse the following measures that are included in this Bill:

1. Removes the ability to get a permit clear for High Value Agriculture, and thus stop large-scale clearing of remnant woodlands.
2. Restores protections for High Value Regrowth on freehold and Indigenous land.
3. It makes much of the prospective legislation retrospective to 17 March, in an attempt to deter panic clearing and panic applications: this is vital to protect against the 'knee-jerk' reactions of 1999 clearing.
4. Restores protections for riparian areas and extends provisions to all Great Barrier Reef catchments.
5. Removes the defence of claimed mistaken clearing, and restores the view that the landholder is responsible for any clearing that takes place on their property.

Background: I am a Queenslander and I completely abhor the disgraceful actions of the Newman government that may, indeed, be termed flagrant vandalism. I am also a voluntary worker for Wilvos wildlife rescue organization. Wilvos members provide a vital service of care for the entire range of birds and animals on the Sunshine Coast. The critical care of raptors, provided by wildlife carers, is helping to curb extinction of endangered eagles, as well as owls, falcons and goshawks. As these birds are rapidly losing their homes, the frequency of care required for their survival highlights the need to curb excessive development. Urban sprawl does nothing to sustain our environment or our economy; it simply changes the natural values of the Sunshine Coast into another Gold Coast.

Increased Wildlife Injury: Following the retrograde actions of the Newman Government's repeal of conservation legislation, the toll of dead and injured wildlife has increased to critical levels. WWF reports that the number of native animals injured in South East Queensland has almost TRIPLED in the past four years. I am horrified, just horrified, that from 2012 to 2014, a staggering 500,000 ha of wildlife habitat was

cleared in Queensland. This figure excludes data for 2015. This vast reduction of habitat results in a lot of dead wildlife and further impacts on diversity. Even when spotters do find them, most native animals do not respond well to transfers from their territory. Habitat remnants left for those that survive are often in unsustainable pockets that cannot support their diverse needs. Animals that lose their territories are attacked and starve to death, particularly when resources of food and shelter are reduced to rubble.

Loss of Habitat: When old-growth forest is lost, tall trees with hollows for breeding cannot be replaced by just planting another tree in its place. Only old trees have hollows, after 100 or more years of growth, maturity and decay. Black cockatoos depend on these hollows for survival and reproduction; as do owls and the entire raptor family group. Whether it is endangered eagles, koalas, sugar gliders, echidnas or platypus, we are losing native wildlife and sustainable habitat at a very rapid rate.

Must we continue to wear the ‘Aussie Backwaters’ tag that depicts the disgrace of our nation’s environmental record in international terms of reference? It seems that the cap fits, particularly in Queensland. Other nations value our wildlife. We may wake up one day, too late to turn the clock back. Do we have to wait until the day we need to fly to Japan to visit our koalas or to see our magnificent eagles?

The scale of land clearing in Queensland has, justifiably, been likened to losses in the Amazon: Considering the data of 500,000 ha of clear-felled vegetation, within two years, this extensive scale of clearing and irreparable damage to our environment has correctly been likened to that of the Amazon. Much of the total area cleared in Queensland destroyed trees from our south-east corner: 200,000 ha of the total area was habitat for threaten species. **Further, the data indicates that 40,000 ha of this was essentially koala habitat, the loss of which signifies a serious threat to the continued survival of our unique and iconic species. We must take URGENT action to protect koalas and I believe that a Koala Protection Act will assist this process.**

Unsustainable directions: While we cannot turn back the clock on these devastating statistics of environmental destruction, it is clear that the level of clearing is unsustainable. In my opinion, the damage to our environment displays an attitude of arrogance and lack of respect towards ecological values; it shows callous disregard for the future of coming generations and indicates complete disinterest in the survival of our native animals and birds. **Queensland desperately needs a change of attitude, culture and direction, by which this Bill will make a significant difference.**

Urban clearing. The last grand stand of centuries old scribbly gums in Peregrine Springs was recently destroyed; aerial photographs of Dulong show broad-scale clearing for development; and I notice that many urban blocks in proximity of Burnside, Woombye and along the Coast have been stripped of all vegetation, including significant trees that have been clear-felled. These blocks now stand stark and bare. Soil integrity and water tables, throughout the region, are also reduced due to broad-scale clearing, as is rainfall. **So much clearing has been done in urban areas, already, that it is essential to put an end to the practice of broad-scale clearing in Queensland.**

An example: a recent devastating loss to our community has been the razing of the last Grand Stand of (old-growth) Scribbly Gum Forest at Ridgeview Drive, Peregrine Springs. Despite Council spotters, the increasing wholesale clearing of bushland, including the loss of hollows and burrows provided by such magnificent old-

growth trees, frequently results in wildlife being injured and killed. When displaced from their territory, animals and birds are left hungry and homeless. Aged care residents also bereaved the loss of visual amenity provided by this green belt. There was little community awareness or engagement, until the destruction was evident. A similar DA plans the removal of mature scribbles on the rise behind Pavilion Drive, at Peregrine Springs.

I strongly support the reinstatement of vegetation conservation, but I believe this Bill simply does not go far enough in protecting environmental values in many respects, including urban development.

Recommendations:

- **Protect Wildlife Habitat.** Far too much wildlife habitat has been cleared in Queensland. Further protections of National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries are now required to offset this extensive damage and to conserve environmental values and ecological diversity in perpetuity for future generations.
- **Ensure Wildlife Reproduction and protect Biodiversity of Species.** It is essential to provide sustainable conditions for our wildlife species to survive and thrive. Bird species, such as the unsurpassed black cockatoos, as well as magnificent endangered eagles, owls and other raptors require essential hollows for breeding. We must ensure conservation of mature, old-growth trees.
- **Urban development requirements.** Currently, there is a disturbing failure in town planning to provide for wildlife corridors. Clearing of vast areas also results in tiny remnant pockets of vegetation, which are entirely unsuitable as habitat for animals and birds. Town planning must take full consideration of these, very basic requirements, in order to sustain our wildlife. A high percentage of treed areas and green belts must be retained in urban areas, connecting links of bicycle paths and walkways between housing developments, green spaces and community meeting places in each suburb. (Although it may not be relevant for this Bill, urban development should incorporate linking bicycle paths to reduce animal deaths from traffic and to be sustainable for our koala population, it must further initiate koala-friendly town planning requirements.)
- **Ban Broad-scale clearing, revert exempted agricultural land and enact sustainable land use.** I recommend that the Bill incorporates a total ban on broad-scale clearing for urban development and agricultural areas, throughout the whole of Queensland. Farming techniques have developed beyond the 'scorched earth' policies of the past. Farmers need to be progressive in their thinking and leave windbreaks and large treed areas to promote rainfall, relieve drought and ensure that salination does not occur. Areas of bushland that have not yet been converted to agricultural land must have exemptions reverted and placed under the protections of the Bill.
- **Extend the Bill to close 'Loopholes'.** Self-assessable codes, such as in remnant clearing and 'thinning', allowing landholders to bulldoze up to 75% of forest cover leaving thin strips must be stopped and these codes must be removed. There are currently no requirements to limit

the scale of clearing; no need to demonstrate prior status of treed areas and SCANDALOUSLY, this includes permission to bulldoze 18 endangered ecosystems... with no offsets. This is an utter disgrace: the fullest extent of constraints that support conservation of ecosystems must be included in the Act.

- **Conserve Koala habitat.** Our diminishing Koala population has little chance of survival with the current fragmentation of habitat and removal of eucalypt food tree species, needed for a varied and healthy diet. Buffer zones connecting habitat areas are vital to provide safety from predators. We must take URGENT action to protect koala habitat and, following the loss of over 40,000 ha Queensland must endorse a Koala Protection Act to assist rehabilitation. Our unique koalas are now listed by WWF-Australia as vulnerable to extinction. What a shocking disgrace this is to our nation!
- **Prevent loss of amenity: Green Space, Wildflowers and Coastal Bushland.** An ongoing concern to community members is that we are losing the natural balance of green space and the visual amenity and unique identity provided by wildflowers and our distinctive coastal bushland. Development has significant impacts on community amenity, on ecological diversity and the ongoing survival of species on the Sunshine Coast.
- **Extended State environmental controls over local Councils.** Sunshine Coast community members, including myself, do not want unmitigated urban sprawl and the loss of our natural environment, biodiversity and wildlife species. Our community cherishes and appreciates, in no small measure, the natural values of our region. This point should be noted as a significant issue, due to the lack of State controls and restraints that currently allow our local Council free rein over the environment.
- **Protect the Reef.** The Great Barrier Reef is already significantly endangered. Degradation, resulting from human activities, as well as erosion run-off from destabilised soil, poses further ... almost insurmountable ... problems for our irreplaceable Reef. Already, coral bleaching indicates that a large section of the GBR is dying. Everything that can be done, including rejection of the Adani Carmichael mine, must now be activated to achieve a reversal.
- **Offset Global Warming.** Underpinning all of the above reasons to conserve vegetation and extend sustainability is the need to offset global warming and reduce the millions of tonnes of CO2 that have already been released into our atmosphere. There is much talk of the need for jobs for our region and for young people. Let this not be at the expense of hastening the impacts that, inevitably, will reduce the health, wealth and wellbeing of the populace.
- **Remnant Vegetation conservation.** It is important to note that, despite the renegade actions of the Newman Government, bipartisan commitments had previously been made in 2004 by both major political parties in support of amendments for a 2006 ban on broadscale clearing of remnant vegetation. For example, M.P. Langbroek is recorded in Hansard as committing to the 2006 ban on broadscale clearing, indicating that it was the best policy for

a sustainable triple bottom line and that it would result in massive reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

- **High Conservation Value, endangered remnant forest and other areas of significant ecological diversity.** I urge the protection of these areas, whether on land that is freehold, leased or of any other status. Queensland has lost far too much of our fragile diversity and ecological values.
- **Acknowledgment of Community Values and Ethics.** In acknowledgement of community values and on the basis of ethical grounds, it is reasonable to expect that Government should proactively support preservation of diversity, ecological values and heritage old-growth trees; retention of existing wildlife habitat and corridors (birds and animals are territorial and cannot be readily relocated); maintain provision of Indigenous places of culture and community amenity, including a high percentage in the natural balance of green space in conservation. So, it is most sincerely hoped that provisions in this Bill will allow for a more progressive step in the right direction.

Considering, for a moment just ONE of our unique species: I cite a case study for koalas, since this animal is widely regarded as symbolic, as it is unique to Australia. Based on a 2014 Urban Development Institute of Australia report that the average size of new residential lots is now 423m², it is estimated that the area of koala habitat cleared in Queensland is the equivalent of nearly 1 million house blocks gone in just two years. This is more than 1300 house blocks per day of koala habitat being bulldozed. It is too late to restore this area but not too late to conserve what is left of this devastation. Regarding our native wildlife, I am also greatly concerned for yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos on the Sunshine Coast. Even now, we may lose amazing assets, such as these wonderful primitive birds, forever. **How can we be so careless of this priceless inheritance for all Australians?**

The Great Barrier Reef is a tremendous drawcard, as long as we take action to protect it from ecological disasters such as the Adani Carmichael mine. We are fortunate that Queensland still offers value in eco-tourism... and we certainly want to keep it that way!

We all have a duty of care to the future that must not be violated by the political motivations or greed of any individual. I believe that the Vegetation Management Reinstatement Bill is entirely necessary to conserve wildlife habitat and that it is absolutely crucial to our immediate and future sustainability and for the health, wellbeing and enjoyment of all Queensland residents and visitors.

Yours sincerely,

Christine Bennett