

15 April 2016

Research Director  
Agriculture and Environment Committee  
Parliament House  
George Street  
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Hansen

SEQ Catchments is a natural resource management organisation, which works with the community, the corporate sector and all levels of Government to ensure the long term sustainability of our natural assets in South East Queensland (SEQ). We make this submission in relation to the Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016.

In South East Queensland, 67.9% (3.02 million people) of Queensland's population live within 1.2% (22,433.6 km<sup>2</sup>) of its total land mass. This leads to land use conflict and competition for natural resources and threats to delivery of the ecosystem services provided by the region's natural assets<sup>1</sup>. No other region in Queensland deals with these circumstances. South East Queensland's natural assets in general, and its vegetation assets in particular, have been modified substantially as a result; hence we argue that the region needs to be viewed and managed differently to the rest of Queensland.

SEQ Catchments notes the Palaszczuk Government is reinstating a number of provisions in the *Vegetation Management Act 1999*, *Water Act 2000*, and *Environmental Offset Act 2014* while keeping a number of the efficiency measures introduced by the former Queensland Government. The reintroduction of the vegetation management component of the riverine protection permit provisions of the Water Act; clarification of the impact provisions of the Offsets Act to remove "significant" and allow for Federal jurisdictional funds resulting from offsets to be managed through the State; and the Vegetation Act amendments are welcomed.

This submission mainly related to the measures applying to the Vegetation Act (the Act). While we understand the importance of these measures in regions outside SEQ, we assess the changes will have little impact in our region. For example, the minimum trigger for vegetation assessment will remain at 5 ha and not the 2 ha in place before the Newman Government changes. We also note the extension of Category R to the additional reef catchments of the Mary and Burnett Rivers in order to manage impacts

<sup>1</sup> State of Queensland (Queensland Treasury and Trade), 2016, Queensland Regional Profile, South East Queensland Region, Brisbane.



on the Great Barrier Reef better; however, that the same logic has not been applied to our very much at risk Moreton Bay draining streams.

It is useful to present some facts derived from the SEQ Catchments geographic information system. The average lot size in South East Queensland is 2.0487 hectares. The estimate for the total amount of remnant vegetation left in South East Queensland is now less than 30%. There are 107,840 lots of between one and five hectares of which 42,800 have some form of remnant vegetation within them. Importantly, the amount of remnant vegetation contained on lots from 1-5 hectares in South East Queensland is 42,260 hectares which is potentially threatened due to the 5 ha rather than 2 ha trigger.

While we certainly appreciate the return of some balance to the provisions of the Act which are likely to result in a sustainable natural asset base, we seek consideration of matters specific to SEQ's vegetation assets. Specifically, we ask the Committee to seriously consider the following issues:

- Serious consideration be given to an assessment of the impacts keeping the 5 hectare trigger in South East Queensland given much of our regions remaining remnant vegetation lies in areas less than 5 ha. If the assessment confirms SEQ Catchment's concerns about the amount of remnant vegetation affected and potentially at risk, then perhaps the Committee could consider a minimum trigger based on regional considerations and ensure SEQ has a 2 ha minimum.
- Category R exists to ensure riparian vegetation is available to perform its vital function in restoring stream integrity and resultant water quality and environmental outcomes for the Reef. The Resilient Rivers Initiative and its previous incarnations in SEQ have all sought to improve water quality and security for the benefit of Moreton Bay and its waterways. The latest iteration contemplates several hundred million dollars to improve the state of the regions' waterways through riparian restoration including substantial revegetation programs in SEQ.

Extending Category R to at risk streams in SEQ just makes sense and would offer a logical basis for the work of the abovementioned initiatives. We strongly urge a risk assessment approach to inform the extension of Category R to at risk streams in SEQ. SEQ Catchments and no doubt Healthy Waterways would be keen to assist in the location of Category R areas for at least high risk catchments in the region. Streams such as Lockyer Creek, Laidley Creek and Warrill Creek provide ready examples of this need.

- We note the many changes to land regulation in the past few years has created confusion in the community in general and the agricultural community in particular. A compliance program which focuses on education and awareness of the rights and obligations conferred by the Act should be considered as a matter of priority. We also observe confusion around the implementation of self-assessable codes. While we believe the codes are a major step forward, we also



note that the government has limited resources devoted to ensuring the outcomes of the Act are achieved. The current program using satellite data and phone contact may assist compliance monitoring in broadscale areas; however, in SEQ, monitoring the success of the self assessable codes may require a different approach. We therefore think it would be helpful to consider establishing a program which focuses on assisting landholders and other entities deliver outcomes which meet code requirements.

Lastly, the issues surrounding cumulative impacts of clearing in SEQ loom large. The minimum trigger is one avenue to allow acceleration of natural asset decline given the amount of remnant vegetation exempt from consideration under the Act in the region. The State Development Assessment Provisions still allow offsetting and other acceptable solutions which erode the integrity of the Act for SEQ. The many priority development areas, urban designations, community infrastructure designations combine to result in a continuing decline in the condition and trend of our remnant vegetation given they create further exemptions under the framework in SEQ.

While there is much to be optimistic about when considering observable regrowth in some local government areas, unfortunately, much of this regrowth will not be protected under the Act. While we understand the economic arguments surrounding the "growth is good" model for economic development, we also know that the cumulative impacts occurring under the currently regulatory framework will continue to facilitate a decline in our natural assets when we are certain there are ways to enable both outcomes.

We believe our region is blessed with too much exceptional natural beauty and productivity to allow these impacts to continue sub-optimally. While the Bill cannot treat the many factors associated with natural asset decline, we also know through our information resources and analysis that we can still facilitate growth with minimal further impact on our natural assets and believe that the regulatory framework has an important contribution to make to that outcome.

I thank the Committee for their consideration and wish it well in its deliberations. Should it require further information or advice, please contact me.

Yours sincerely



Simon Warner  
**Chief Executive Officer**