



April 20, 2016

Research Director  
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 Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland Fraser Coast Branch Inc. (Wildlife Fraser Coast) is pleased to have the opportunity to comment on the Queensland Government's *Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016*.

Wildlife Fraser Coast is an a-political community group whose objectives are to:

1. preserve Australia's flora and fauna
2. educate all sections of the community, particularly the young, in understanding the principles of conservation and preservation of the natural environment
3. discourage the destruction, exploitation or unnecessary development of any part of the natural environment
4. encourage rational land use and proper planning of development and use of the natural environment and management thereof

We have some 68 members.

***Recent history of our group:***

The Fraser Coast Branch of Wildlife Queensland has worked tirelessly for the conservation of native wildlife and wildlife habitat since its inception in 1989. Conservation of habitat and preservation of habitat values is central to all our work.

Over the past decade, for example:

- we have done surveys of acid frogs (especially *Crinia tinnula*) which are threatened by loss of habitat,
- monitored the condition of coral in Hervey Bay which is massively impacted by runoff due to soil erosion in the Mary River as well as climate change
- currently we are striving to protect our struggling koala population. Despite the koala being a threatened species, koala habitat is still being lost to development and agriculture. In our region, the population appears to have crashed between 2014 and 2015, with 18 being recorded in a koala count in October 2014 and only five being recorded in October 2015 despite mobilization of a larger team of people available to count them. Their numbers were significantly higher in previous years. We have just completed an *Everyone's Environment* funded project (Queensland Government) to plant koala food trees and increase public awareness.

Land clearing is the chief cause of the detrimental impact on these ecosystems and species we are working to protect.

Removing vegetation cover reduces habitat and increases soil erosion. It also contributes to greenhouse gas emissions which increase the ocean temperature and acidity causing coral bleaching and death. Since 2012, increased land clearing in Queensland has contributed significantly to Australia's greenhouse gas emissions.

### ***Our recommendations***

We strongly support the reinstatement of laws protecting high conservation status regrowth. This will increase the area of currently threatened ecosystems in Queensland leading to increased resilience especially with the spectre of increased periods of drought, flooding and bushfire.

Queensland has a comparatively small area of National Park-protected habitat. Survival of many species is dependent on conservation of vegetation on private land. Indiscriminate clearing is a major threat to biodiversity.

We support the removal of current regulations allowing “high value agriculture” as a reason for removal of “of concern” native vegetation. There is currently a large area of land that exists in the “white zone” that can be used for agriculture.

We support even stronger legislation to protect and increase koala habitat in Queensland. The impact of clearing in conjunction with disease and urban dangers is posing the threat of their extinction in our area. We have attached a map produced by WWF-Australia showing the loss of koala habitat in the Fraser Coast area.

The corals of Hervey Bay compared to those of the Great Barrier Reef have greater resistance to turbidity. However, even these corals suffered a massive die-off after flooding in the Mary River Catchment in 2011 delivered a deluge of sediment into the sea. It is essential that riparian vegetation is protected and restored. Also, livestock should be denied access to riparian areas.

We would also like to see penalties for illegal clearing strengthened and enforced. Owners of Nature Refuges, who make considerable sacrifices to protect natural ecosystems, were afraid to sell their properties since it was apparent that illegal clearing would receive no penalty so the integrity of their properties could not be guaranteed. Non-enforcement of regulations means the regulations will certainly be flouted.

We therefore fully support the approval of Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016.

Yours sincerely

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