

From: [Catherine Laurence](#)
To: [vminquiry](#)
Subject: Submission on the Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016
Date: Thursday, 21 April 2016 11:58:20 AM

Dear Committee,

I am writing to express my position on the Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016. I have a strong interest in matters of land use change and biodiversity, with a professional background in sustainable land use planning, and a deep personal concern for the future health of our natural environment.

I'm very glad that steps are being taken to strengthen Queensland's land clearing laws. Our forests have suffered far too much degradation, and continue to do so, which is a tragedy for our unique wildlife, the climate and the Great Barrier Reef. For example, we know that 40,000 hectares of koala habitat was cleared just between 2012 and 2014. This is unconscionable and cannot be allowed to continue.

I strongly support the passage of this Bill, in particular the tightening of protection for high value regrowth and riparian vegetation, especially in catchment areas of the Great Barrier Reef. This is urgently needed, especially given that the Government's undertaking on this was a major reason UNESCO refrained from listing the reef as endangered.

The abolition of permits for 'high value agriculture' is also an essential measure, as this permitting regime has enabled large scale clearing that should never have taken place. I also agree with making landholders bear the burden of proof where illegal clearing has taken place on their land.

Ensuring the Bill will have retrospective effect is another vital provision, as previous experience has shown that proposed reforms spark large-scale clearing in anticipation of changes coming into force.

However, the Bill needs to be stronger to remove remaining loopholes and take a more proactive approach to stop illegal clearing. In particular, there is an urgent need to remove (or significantly reform) the Thinning Self-Assessable Code regime, as in its current form this allows enormous degradation to go ahead perfectly legally. For example, I was shocked to hear that approximately 4,800 ha of mulga and brigalow forest was legally cleared at Taylor's Plains in western Queensland between December 2014 and July 2015.

The Bill should also put ecological impact front and centre, and not allow this to be overridden by exemptions unless it is shown to prevent the loss of biodiversity and maintains ecological processes in keeping with the purpose of the Bill.

Finally, the definition of High Value Regrowth should be updated to reflect regrowth from areas cleared more recently than the current 1989 baseline.

Thank you for considering my submission. I urge the Committee to include the strongest protections possible, in line with the immense value of Queensland's precious remnant vegetation.

Yours sincerely,
Catherine Laurence



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