

Queensland Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016

SUBMISSION TO PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY

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27 APR 2016

AEC

1.0 INTRODUCTION

My wife and I are rural property owners in the Black Mountain area at Federal on the Sunshine Coast. Together with two other neighbours we have established Voluntary Conservation Agreements over our properties involving 112 hectares (277 acres). Under the Agreements we are implementing, in partnership with Noosa Council, environmental management plans designed to restore and enhance the biodiversity of our properties.

In addition to our properties there are adjoining lands of similar habitat which cover approximately 250 hectares (615 acres)

Our efforts to-date have been very successful with significantly increased and diversified wildlife numbers. Indeed our properties have been recognised by WILVOS and Wildcare Australia as Safe Release areas for rescued wildlife. Releases have been made on all three properties.

The original acceptance of our properties into the VCA scheme gave recognition to our properties forming part of a "*core area of bushland*" that covers the Black Mountain Range and extends down the slopes and gullies to the north and south. Significantly for this submission, reference was made by Council in the establishment of the Environmental Management Plan under the Agreement, to threatened species being present, including Koalas.

Further, under Council's proposed Plan all three properties are categorised as Environment Protection Areas under the Biodiversity and Vegetation Protection Overlay.

Despite Koala numbers falling dramatically in the urban areas of the Noosa Shire, there are pockets of Koala habitation in the Hinterland of Noosa Shire and we are fortunate to live in one such pocket.

However, despite the presence of Koalas and the recognition of the special environments of our properties, our areas are not able to be identified as Koala Habitat Areas by the state government or our local Council.

2.0 SUBMISSION

Koala Vegetation Protection

2.1 We recently sought to have our area recognised under Noosa Council's proposed Koala Management Plan as a Koala Habitat Area. We immediately hit a problem when advised that under the Newman Government's changed policies, the mostly regrowth vegetation existing in our areas was not recognised as being of value and therefore did not warrant protection.

We put the following arguments in support of our claim:

- a. **Koalas are actually present on our lands** and have been sighted over several years and to this day. Their presence has been confirmed by a Koala scat detection dog.
- b. **We have large areas of vegetation that are koala habitat type**, including significant areas of remnant and regrowth eco- systems. Most of the re-growth vegetation is estimated to be 60 to 80 years old. In particular, the area is recognised for the significant presence of Spotted Gum – *Corymbia Citriodora*. There is also an extensive distribution of Small-fruited Grey gum, *Eucalyptus Propinquu*. Other Koala supporting trees that have been identified by Noosa landcare, include Narrow-leafed Ironbark (*Eucalyptus Creba*) and Brush Box - *Lophostemon Confertus*
- c. **The habitat is largely undamaged** with only minor agricultural pursuits occurring on several properties.
- d. **The Area is recognised by Council as an Environment Protection Area**

- e. **The area is a part of the major environmental corridor** along the Black Mountain Range and into the Mary Valley.
- f. **The existence of 112 hectares (277 acres) under VCA management** within the area.
- g. **Significant areas of State owned land**, held as road reserves in the area.
- h. **Lack of through road access within the area.** The few roads within the area mostly consist of unsealed or unformed single lane gravel roads.
- i. **The area contains sources of permanent and periodic water availability.**
- j. **The area is remote and most Shire residents appear not to know of its existence.**
- k. **The area is zoned Rural, sparsely populated, with most holdings below 100 hectares in size.**

While we are hopeful that Noosa Council will introduce non statutory mapping to inform Council Planning decisions covering ours and other areas in a similar situation, , this falls along way short of the Koala protection needed and currently denied under existing State legislation.

Council's recent Koala mapping research found:

1. **Five previously unknown areas of Koala presence in the Shire.**
2. **The majority of properties in the Shire confirmed with Koalas present, were on private properties with re-growth vegetation.**

Recommendations:

1. **I believe from our example, it is clear that re-growth vegetation is supportive of biodiversity enhancement, including the protection of vulnerable species, in our case Koalas. The role of regrowth is ignored under current State laws and it is strongly recommended that the previous provisions be restored.**
2. **Further, State Statutory Koala protection measures appear to ignore the possible presence of Koalas and Koala Habitat in the non-urban areas of the South East of the State. As Koala numbers will continue to fall in urban and adjacent areas, the need to protect Koalas in low non-urban risk areas becomes increasingly urgent. It is strongly recommended that the State act to rectify this flaw.**

PETER BURKE

22nd April 2016

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