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To the Agricultural and Environment Parliamentary Committee:

There are a number of important aspects of the *Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016* that should be highlighted when you submit your report to the House on June 30 2016. They are as follows:

- Since restrictions on clearing were removed in 2012 there has been a massive upsurge in clearing in Queensland. This has had a number of impacts on habitat, climate change and the Great Barrier Reef.

#### **Habitat loss**

- Clearing vegetation kills birds along with innumerable native mammals, reptiles and other native animals and plants. This isn't just a cost for Queensland. Many of the birds killed are winter migrants to Queensland from southern states. Nature lovers will be seeing and hearing the loss of birdlife throughout the country. It is well documented that our native flora and fauna is in decline and loss of habitat will just add to the impact climate change will have on plant and animal species. Habitat loss we can do something about immediately. The proposed amendments will protect ecologically important areas as well as riparian zones.

#### **Climate Change**

- Australia's tree-clearing emissions were dropping until the Newman LNP Government gutted Queensland's tree-clearing laws and unleashed the bulldozers. In the last year of published data, Queensland cleared nearly 300,000 hectares -more than the entire area of the ACT. This means Queensland's tree clearing almost doubled in two years, from 153,646 hectares in 2011-12 to 296,324ha in 2013-14, with emissions increasing from 22 million tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e to 36 million tonnes.
- Recent data on record temperatures, coral bleaching and extreme weather events make it clear that climate change is a reality. By allowing this broad scale clearing to continue we are negating Australia's commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

#### **Great Barrier Reef**

- Land clearing in reef catchments will increase sediment runoff onto the reef. This adds pressure to an already stressed system as indicated by the massive bleaching event that has occurred on the reef. The Great Barrier Reef brings significant tourism income to the State and employs thousands of people. The income to the state and employment directly related to reef tourism needs to be taken into account when weighing up the costs and benefits of restricting land clearing.
- The proposed *Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016* also introduces a number of amendments that will increase the government's ability to prosecute landholder who continue to illegally clear. The proposed amendments

clarify the evidentiary burden for determining the person responsible for unauthorised clearing. Given the unlikely possibility that someone unknown was responsible for clearing, the legislation places the onus of proof on the landholder not government.

- The amendments also remove “the mistake of fact defence” which has in the past enabled landholder to say they had wrongly interpreted maps or misidentified vegetation types. Given the government’s provision of detailed maps and information on which vegetation communities are restricted and where they are located, it is reasonable that the landholder has to take due care prior to starting clearing.
- The proposed legislation is also retrospective to 17 March in an attempt to deter panic clearing and a flood of applications prior to the Bill coming into force. This is a good proposal when coupled with the provision that enables the government to give a person a restoration notice for unlawful clearing, which can also include land adjacent to the unlawfully cleared area.

### **Conclusion**

The *Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016* must be passed into law to protect our environment, to reduce the extent of carbon emissions and to protect the Great Barrier Reef. The Committee therefore should report favourably on the legislation and recommend that the Bill be passed into law.

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21/4/2016