

21 April 2016

Research Director
Agriculture and Environment Committee
Parliament House
BRISBANE QLD 4000

By Email: vminquiry@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing concerning the matter of the Bill just introduced to Queensland Parliament to re-strengthen the state's tree clearing laws – the *Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016* and understand that it has been referred to the Agriculture and Environment Parliamentary Committee for an Inquiry.

I join the 200,000 + Australians and 40,000 + Queenslanders who are strongly in favour of this bill which will close the loophole and restore prosecution powers and I highly recommend that you take all necessary steps to ensure its passing and outline as follows:

1. The bill removes the ability to get a permit clear for so-called High Value Agriculture, and thus stop large-scale clearing of remnant woodlands.
2. It restores protections for ecologically important regrowing woodlands ('High Value Regrowth') on freehold and Aboriginal land.
3. The bill restores protections for trees next to riverbanks ('riparian areas') and extending provisions from some to all Great Barrier Reef catchments.
4. The passing of the bill will remove the 'oops' defence of claimed mistaken clearing, and will restore the *starting* presumption that a landholder is responsible for clearing that takes place on their property.
5. It makes much of the prospective legislation retrospective to 17 March, in an attempt to deter panic applications and panic clearing which has obvious devastating effects.

I feel it important that we all keep clear in the forefront of our minds the chilling, shocking and devastating footage shown on the ABC recently of the bulldozer and chain style clearing of the property in North QLD. I must admit the footage brought me to tears and has prompted me to write this letter as I feel very passionately about this subject.

I understand that following the weakening of controls in Queensland there was a 229% increase in tree clearing in reef catchments according to the Auditor General. I've read that the scale of the recent land clearing is of a size larger than the ACT with one property alone permitted to clear 600 square kilometres.

Martin Taylor for conservation group WWF described the increase as "meteoric and extremely alarming" and I concur.

- 2009/10 - 77 590 hectares
- 2010/11 - 91 690 hectares
- 2011/12 - 153 000 hectares (last official figures)
- 2012/13 - 230 000 hectares* (leaked figures subject to final analysis)
- 2013/14 - 278 000 hectares* (leaked figures subject to final analysis)

*The 2012/13 and 2013/14 figures are still subject to statistical quality assurance from within the Department of Science, Information Technology and Innovation.

The surge in clearing rates is thought to be a direct result of a change in vegetation laws which occurred under the previous state government led by Campbell Newman. I understand that the idea was to make it easier for farmers to clear their land to make way for "high-value" agricultural projects, bringing jobs and productivity to the state. I believe that clearing under the legal loophole had serious consequences.

Not surprisingly, there has been an upsurge in sick and injured native animals in QLD. Wildlife rescues by the RSPCA jumped from about 8,000 in 2011 to 22,000 in the past year. When WWF checked with other wildlife rescuers in Queensland they too reported recent increases in native animal rescues, which most put down to more tree clearing and habitat loss. In areas where there are no wildlife rescuers, we can only guess at how many thousands more of our precious threatened species have perished, not before dying a slow, and agonising death in some cases. Most Australians like myself care deeply about our native plants and animals so the escalating bushland destruction in Queensland is a very sad tale.

I live in Caloundra on the Sunshine Coast and have spent 35 years watching the vegetation change and the gradual loss of habitat for my neighbours, the original inhabitants of this town. I am fortunate to live in a location where I overlook Council land that has not yet been cleared, where I receive the daily joy of watching the harmonious native ecosystem of creatures and birds enjoying this small patch of land e.g. goannas, kangaroos, snakes, cockatoos, lorikeets, butterflies, bush flowers etc, not to mention the nocturnal creatures. This is just a very small section of land that I truly hope stays in-tact for many many many years to come, as one of the very few locations in Caloundra that has not been cleared for development. I've been advised by Roy from Sunshine Coast Koala Rescue that we have unfortunately lost all but one koala from Caloundra due to their habitat loss and our day to day living, cars and dogs etc. Their memory remains in our hearts and a reminder is on the gum trees that still bear their scratch marks. You will be aware that the RSPCA has blamed tree clearing for a surge in injured and distressed wildlife including koalas. With the remainder severely affected by roads, development and wild and domestic dogs, this is a critical time to act.

My heart aches to think of the creatures and ecosystems that have been destroyed in some cases permanently, with extinction of species, in the almost 300,000ha land cleared in 2013/2014, not to mention the land cleared since that has not been reported as yet, with

valuable, irreplaceable fauna and flora eco-systems that survived thousands and thousands of years, thriving before this irresponsible, unforgiveable attitude by recent governments to allow this destruction.

I have learnt from WWF that in the last 200 years more mammals have become extinct in Australia than anywhere else in the world. When you see the bigger picture of tree clearing and habitat destruction it is not surprising. Last year WWF-International's Living Forests Report named eastern Australia as a "global deforestation front", one of 11 regions within which more than 80% of global forest destruction is projected to occur between 2010 and 2030.

My further concerns are of course the impacts from tree clearing on the Great Barrier Reef from Great Barrier Reef catchments, climate change, release of millions of tonnes CO2 from tree clearing and that land clearing obviously leads to drought. Bulldozing bushland hurts the reef in another way by generating sediment pollution that can smother and kill corals and sea grass. If land is converted to crops, you also get ongoing agrichemical pollution.

I've also been advised that 22million hectares of bushland has already been mapped exempt, free to clear in QLD. This figure is extraordinary and I am devastated to hear such a thing.

I believe that the proposed bill is reasonable, cautious and conservative and that it should most definitely be supported by yourself and all of the Committee and subsequently passed. In closing, I request you please make sure that you ask for and review all the evidence and consider the long-term future of our country and her inhabitants.

Thank you, on behalf of myself and the 200,000 + Australians and 40,000 + Queenslanders that are strongly in favour of this bill.

Kind regards


Kym McMahon


Caloundra QLD 4551

