

WRITTEN SUBMISSION

Inquiry into the Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016

My 2.353 ha property [REDACTED] near Childers is permanently conserved by a legal covenant written on the land's title under offset provisions of the Vegetation Management Act 1999. The property is zoned Rural Protected (Category 1) which is the highest level of protection under the Act, and the covenant binds present and future owners.

In 2013 following representations from some agriculture organisations the then LNP Queensland Government changed the Vegetation Management Act. These big changes, along with how the LNP government interpreted the Act's remaining provisions, made the Act worthless for protecting my property. The seesaw tipped too far.

Legally, after these big changes, the Vegetation Management Act (at the same time) both protected my conserved property and did not protect my conserved property.

Some personal background

I grew up on a sugarcane farm near Childers and did quite a lot of farm work until I was 23 years old. More recently I have worked on environmental issues for a total of 41 years and have been active in environmental conservation on privately-owned rural land for 34 years. For the 17 years 1975–1992 I worked full-time on environmental policy with the Commonwealth Government in Canberra – especially on information to increase public awareness of native trees in rural landscapes. My formal qualifications are a BA in geography from the University of Queensland.

In 1976 I bought my property at Childers from my parents to conserve and rehabilitate the native vegetation on it. This ecosystem rehabilitation project is now 40 years old making it one of Queensland's older projects on private land. This piece of land has been owned by my family since 1908 and I have known it since the 1940s.

Structure of this submission

This **Submission** contains my Recommendations drawn from 41 years' environmental experience mostly involving native vegetation in the rural landscape. **Attachment 1** to the Submission addresses public awareness.

When the ALP government applied the original Vegetation Management Act 1999 its ongoing program to inform public awareness about the Act was under-powered. This left the Act and the ALP government vulnerable to well-targeted campaigns that especially connected with rural communities. This oversight must **not** be repeated with this present reinstatement of the Act.

So **Attachment 1** to this Submission shares some thoughts on:

- the sorts of popular arguments opposing an effective Vegetation Management Act that can circulate in rural communities, and
- how to communicate with and raise public awareness within rural communities.

Australia has shown an ability to do the kind of public awareness campaign that is aimed at cultural change rather than changing a number of individuals. For example, by world standards the Australian campaign to reduce tobacco-smoking has been very successful. Some decades ago many Australians smoked tobacco, but the culture was changed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1. The new bill should remove from the present Vegetation Management Act the many clearing exemptions under which landowners especially those involved with agriculture can clear native vegetation. The present Act contains so many clearing exemptions that a landowner wanting to clear could have difficulty deciding which exemption to choose. For example, the present Act allows rural landowners to clear to construct “a water feature” or “a track” neither of which is defined – potentially these words could mean anything.

Recommendation 2. . The new Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 must continue to conserve and protect land that is already conserved under the Vegetation Management Act 1999. My land is conserved as Rural Protected (Category 1) under the Vegetation Management Act 1999, and this Category is the highest level of protection under the 1999 Act. The new Act must continue to conserve my land.

Recommendation 3. The new Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 must protect vegetation growing on land conserved under that Act from neighbouring landholders or their agents clearing, poisoning, lopping or destroying vegetation including trees growing on the conserved land. The new Act must prohibit destruction of boundary fences along conserved areas by neighbouring landowners or their agents.

This is a boundary issue and an edge issue. Edges and edge effects are very important in the ecology of conserved areas – for example, north-facing edges need to be vegetated to shade out full-sun weed species. Edges and boundaries affect neighbouring land use.

The new Act must state that if a neighbouring landholder or her/his agent has a problem with vegetation growing on the conserved land, the Act requires the landholder or agent to discuss the matter with the owner of the land conserved under the Act. The owner of the conserved land is its manager not the neighbour.

This provision of the new Act must apply to government agencies including Shire Councils, Regional Councils and State agencies as well as to private landowners.

Recommendation 4. Land conserved under the new Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 will need to be managed. The Act could encourage owners of land conserved under the Act to prepare a voluntary “whole property plan” for their properties. This provision of the new Act could also apply to government agencies including Shire Councils, Regional Councils and State agencies.

A voluntary plan can review the range of potential uses for land conserved under the Act. The book *Think Trees Grow Trees* published by AGPS Canberra in 1985 reviews a range of ideas for using native vegetation in rural landscapes. Such voluntary “whole property plans” should also encompass any connectivity with off-site areas. Such voluntary plans would well complement the Act and be part of it.

Recommendation 5. The new Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 could be complemented by a standard contract (with allowances for differences between conserved properties) made between the Government and the land-owner. The covenant or agreement would apply to land conserved under the Act and would state some basic features of the relationship. The basic contract/agreement would also allow for differences between individual properties – for example, some conserved areas contain creeks and others don’t.

This would help people, especially those with newly acquired conserved land. If the government and a land-owner have to “start from scratch” and prepare a contract, important aspects may be over-looked.

Recommendation 6. The new Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 must aim to protect land that carries conserved vegetation from being impacted by “destructive external influences” that originate off-site. Examples of destructive impacts from off-site sources include:

- large quantities of storm-water run-off flowing at high velocities with great energy and erosive power after drainage modifications constructed on agricultural lands and/or road reserves upstream in the catchment,
- drifting and washing of acutely toxic and carcinogenic sprays from agricultural lands over nearby land conserved under the new Act and over any houses there,
- noise levels that at times are loud for nearby residents,
- honeybees used for pollination can swarm and occupy natural nest hollows and nest boxes on the conserved property.

Such off-site influences often don’t function alone but in combination with other factors.

Recommendation 7. The new Act will restrict clearing, and will increase the amount of privately-owned conserved land. The new bill should affirm that changes in land-use CAN change the natural environment, including land conserved under the new Act – for instance, by changing the hydrology on conserved land.

The new bill should state that any person and/or organization modifying drainage as part of agriculture or horticulture or construction is responsible for any consequent damage to downstream properties conserved under the new Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016. The bill should require that if drainage on agricultural land and/or a road reserve is modified and so floods and damages land conserved under the Act and/or buildings on it, the agricultural enterprise and/or the roads authority is

responsible for preventing recurrence and for rehabilitating damage already done on the conserved land. This is somewhat similar to drainage requirements in urban areas.

The owner of the conserved land should then have to **demonstrate** that damage to her/his conserved land has occurred – the owner **can't just say** that it has, s/he has to show that it has.

Changed hydrology can have adverse effects on properties conserved under the Vegetation Management Act and/or the new Act. For example, in my experience the switch from irrigated sugarcane and unirrigated beef cattle pasture to irrigated avocado orchards in the catchment upstream from my land changed the hydrology – especially by changing the flow of storm-water run-off (“flash flooding”) and by increasing the amount of water in the catchment. During extreme rainfall events and during prolonged rain, orchards can act like a big metal roof and discharge large quantities of surface flow – this can be different from a field of sugarcane.

Recommendation 8. Either as part of the new Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 or as a separate exercise, the Queensland Government should review and up-date the State’s “control of use” legislation applying to pesticides. The aim should be for a “best practice control of use” system.

Horticultural and agricultural sprays can drift and wash many km from agricultural lands on to other land including land conserved under the new Act. Dispersal through the environment can be considerable. For example, Endosulfan (now banned globally) has been found in air, water, sediments and biota thousands of kilometers from use areas, and found in the tissue and blood of Arctic and Antarctic wildlife including seals and whales. Not much agriculture is done at the planet’s poles!

Some chemicals now used to replace Endosulphan may not in future be regarded as more benign than Endosulphan.

The Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) assesses and can approve pesticides up until the point of sale. After sale, the various State “control of use” legislations come into play. The “control of use” legislation of each State is intended to set out what is unacceptable in terms of harm caused by **unintentional or intentional movement** of pesticides from place of use.

Queensland has some of Australia’s weakest and most problematic “control of use” legislation, and this is compounded by thin or absent enforcement – I recall asking not one but several government agencies in Bundaberg before eventually being told that drifting and washing of sprays from point of use had nothing to do with government. This illustrates how enforcement of Queensland’s “control of use” legislation can be absent.

Queensland does not have one “control of use” Act and in Queensland a number of different Acts could potentially apply. This further weakens the “control of use” functions.

Recommendation 9. The new bill should state that zoning land as Rural does not automatically mean it is **only** agricultural land and **only** farm land and always will be. Land zoned Rural is not land that is to be used only and exclusively for agriculture. The Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 can apply to land that is zoned Rural. This is important because some agricultural lobby groups can use the “rural land is farm land” to attack legislation such as the new Act.

Recommendation 10. There should be greater transparency in financial dealings involving the new Act. Some people say that money and environmental conservation such as the new Act are in two separate “baskets”, but Australia is a free-enterprise market economy with elected governments, and money makes it work. All sorts of causes (including lots of worthy causes) need money to function.

The popular sayings “You have to track the money” and “Money makes the world go round” remind us that this applies to land conserved under the Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016.

Anybody doing any environmental work anywhere needs to appreciate the society they work within. In any free-enterprise market economy with elected governments, money often makes things happen – it’s the society. I recall somebody being asked on TV why his worthy campaign for something or other had not been more successful and he replied “We didn’t have enough money”.

I was told that in Queensland an effective campaign for a big worthy goal such as better protecting migrating shorebirds or winning a Federal seat in Parliament could cost about \$70 000 or even \$80 000. Money for any campaign has to come from somewhere, and in reality it mostly has to be raised from donations. So in any such campaign, a strategic aim is to identify and appeal to donors. For a big campaign looking for \$70,000 or \$80,000 the hope is to attract:

- The “mums and dads” donors who give say \$10, \$20, \$50 or even \$100 or \$200 per household. However, the problem with over-reliance on these donors alone is that a big sum like \$70,000+ probably won’t be reached.
- Some donors who give around about \$1000. Again, over-reliance upon this source probably won’t raise \$70,000+.
- A few donations within the \$5000 to \$10 000 range. Donations within this range can be relatively valuable because a few of them together can really boost a campaign fund.
- One large donation of \$20 000 or \$30 000 or even \$40 000. This is the big prize because one such donation can put a \$70,000 or \$80,000 goal within reach. Some surplus funds may even become available to fund other worthy projects.

One hypothetical scenario illustrating how in future this could affect an area conserved under the new Act is:

- A friendly government may **donate** a large sum (perhaps \$150 000 or \$200 000) to an irrigated farm organisation to build a dam that will improve water quality on the Great Barrier Reef.
- The farm organisation would independently donate \$30 000 or \$40 000 **of its own money** to a political fund.
- The farm organisation may select a dam site at a creek on riparian land conserved under the new Act.
- A friendly government would “de-serve” the riparian land at the dam site, or the dam builder would not seek government approval.
- The conserved land would be cleared and a dam constructed.

If this sort of hypothetical scenario actually did happen in the future, both the **financial** consequences and the **symbolic** messages would be considerable. I want to emphasise that (so far as I know) nothing in this hypothetical future scenario is illegal or unprofessional, but the scenario illustrates a need to consider the context within which the new Act will function. Australia is not a subsistence-level society, and the old saying, “You have to track the money” can’t be ignored. Transparency has a role.

Recommendation 11. When the ALP government applied the original Vegetation Management Act 1999 its ongoing program to inform the public and raise awareness was under-powered. For example, the big difference between legislating to conserve biodiversity on public land and legislating to conserve biodiversity on privately-owned land was insufficiently appreciated. Public awareness of conservation of biodiversity issues was assumed to be greater than it is.

Having worked on conservation of biodiversity on a rural property for 40 years, I discuss in **Attachment 1** some issues about how governments can raise awareness about the new Act.

Attachment 1 outlines a 4-stage communication process:

1. Explain what the new Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2016 will do, and how and why – if this is not done, people won’t understand the Act; it won’t be intelligible,
2. Deal with popular “common sense” beliefs known as “defeaters” that oppose the new Act – if people believe one or more “defeaters”, they won’t believe the Act because it won’t be “common sense” for them; the new Act won’t have credibility,
3. Explain the new Act in the language and worldviews common among landowners and voters in rural, regional and “small town” communities – if this is not done, the new Act won’t seem plausible to them,
4. Ask people within urban, rural and regional communities for their personal support for the Act – this Stage 4 often involves people changing their behavior in some ways.

In a government program looking for greater public awareness outcomes, the most likely big mistake is to briefly sketch (1) above, then skip (2) and (3) and quickly move to (4). If this is done and stages (2) and (3) are skipped, the information program will usually fail.

Recommendation 12. The new bill should require Regional Councils and Shire Councils to have a portfolio (preferably a separate portfolio) for Conservation of Biodiversity, and at least one Conservation of Biodiversity Officer with appropriate formal qualifications and work experience. Some Councils will only do this if required by the Queensland Government. I am aware of one Regional Council that does not even have an Environment Officer, and there may be other similar Councils.

The Queensland Government can't take for granted that Shire Councils and Regional Councils will all be sympathetic and helpful towards new Act but that private landowners won't be.

A justification for this Recommendation 12 is that I have heard the term "environment" defined loosely to mean almost anything. For example, "environment" can refer to urban footpaths for use by elderly people with wheelie walkers and battery-powered mopeds. In farming districts, I have heard the term "environment" restricted to aspects of agriculture. In other socio-economic groups, the word "environment" can even refer to vague undefined "quality of life" issues. So this recommendation links the term "environment" to "conservation of biodiversity".

The legislation should require the Council to state publicly of the elected Council member who holds that Conservation of Biodiversity portfolio:

- what formal educational qualifications if any in conservation of biodiversity that Council member possesses, and
- what experience if any in conservation of biodiversity that Council member has.

A justification for this is that in any portfolio dealing with any field a balance always needs to be struck between "political reliability" and knowledge of the portfolio issues. Given the ongoing public awareness problems that bogged the previous Vegetation Management Act 1999, the seesaw needs to swing more towards the knowledge side.

Recommendation 13. The new bill should require all Regional Councils and Shire Councils to maintain and support a Land for Wildlife program with at least three levels of protection:

1. an initial level of protection which does not bind future owners of the land and which does not entitle owners to much financial and/or other support from governments,
2. a middle level which does not bind future owners of the land, but which entitles the landowner to some limited financial and other support from governments as compensation for the landowner's contribution to conserving biodiversity, and
3. the highest level of protection which binds future owners and which entitles the landowner to a greater degree of financial and other support from governments – as compensation for the landowner's contribution and commitment to conserving Australian and global biodiversity.

Justification for this Recommendation is that:

- an aim of the Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 is to conserve biodiversity,
- the land conserved under the new Act still needs to be managed appropriately, and Land for Wildlife is an ongoing established program that can greatly assist,
- the LfW program increases public awareness and it well complements the new Act.

Recommendation 14. The new bill should outlaw use of destructive Behaviour Modification Techniques (BMTs) to target, intimidate and harass landowners and others who support the new Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016. This provision of the Act must give supporters of the new Act protection not just from individuals and groups but also from political operators, office-bearers in political parties, and government authorities including Shire Councils and Regional Councils.

Destructive BMTs are also known as “mind control” and “thought reform”, and an older term from the 1950s and the Korean War was “brainwashing”. BMTs essentially are reward or punishment for action. The techniques are used from within a win-lose perspective (without any caring and genuine concern) to get and to use power and control over individuals and groups of people. Once we understand this, the whole world-view and its components falls into place.

In Australia in the 1950s, if an organisation used destructive BMTs it was probably a cult. Over the decades since the 1950s, legitimate psychological research since the 1960s and 1970s especially in America greatly improved Western understanding of BMTs and how they affect people. Use of these potentially destructive psychological techniques has spread more widely in Western society generally.

Unfortunately, destructive BMTs can damage the victims by, for example, implanting phobias especially guilt and fear. Such phobias change behaviour but damage the victims’ personality. Use of destructive BMTs is a type of “abuse”.

Destructive BMTs could in future be used by some clandestine political cells and networks opposing an effective Vegetation Management Act. The techniques can be used in future against selected landowners with permanently conserved areas on their land.

Recommendation 15. Protection given by the Queensland anti-discrimination and anti-abuse legislation should include rural landowners and others who are “targeted”:

- because of their support for the new Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016, or
- because they have conserved vegetation on their land.

Such targeting may include use of destructive BMTs and destruction of vegetation on the conserved site.

Recommendation 16. To complement the new Act, the Queensland Government needs to target, “The Australian national security apparatus is there, so let’s use it against political opponents such as greenies”.

Any campaign needs information as much as it needs funds. Australia needs a national security organisation to protect society against terrorists and similar threats. However, some unknown political organisations opposed to vegetation conservation on privately-owned land potentially use the national security organisation to target:

- people who support the new Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016, and/or
- people who have conserved vegetation on their land, and
- presumably other political opponents.

For example, some unknown secretive cells or networks (I don’t know who) apparently regarded me as a convenient focus for a campaign against vegetation conservation on privately owned land. I found when I travelled by air I was mostly and routinely taken aside and searched for explosives prior to boarding the aircraft. By listing a “greenie” as a potential terrorist, some unknown political identity groups opposed to vegetation conservation on privately-owned land potentially could use Australia’s national security arrangements to monitor my travel and electronic communications such as my emails and phone calls. Such monitoring can be a source of information.

For example, on one flight to Sydney to visit family in NSW I was taken aside at the airport and searched for explosives – I saw an A4 sheet of paper with a list of names with about half the names ticked. After I was searched for explosives I saw the security person tick my name.

In another incident I am confident that an email I sent was passed on quickly to the Australian security network because of how I was searched for explosives on my next flight.

The Queensland Government should rein in any future use of Australia’s security organisations to target supporters of the new Act.

Recommendation 17. Where have all the authors gone? The question, “Who wrote this?” Is foundational in assessing comments on and opinions of legislation such as the Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016. This has big implications for public awareness of the new Act.

Simple anonymity can turn new beginners into experts, raw recruits into experienced veterans, and lobbyists into unbiased neutral commentators. The inability of the public to know the authors of some information relevant to environmental issues is an on-going problem.

The new bill should require all comments on the new Act or the operation of the new Act including media and social media commentary to state the author, the author’s status, and the author’s direct experience in conservation of biodiversity. If a media piece has more than one

author, this must apply to all authors. The new bill must prevent authorship being attributed only to an organisation as this conceals the individual person(s) who wrote the commentary – the media piece becomes anonymous and few know if the author(s) has any background in conservation of biodiversity.

Also, if a media piece comments on the Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Act or operation of the Act, the media organization including social media must clearly identify to the viewer or reader or hearer which person or organisation funded the piece.

The ongoing public awareness problems that troubled the previous Vegetation Management Act 1999 are a justification for this Recommendation.

Recommendation 18. The present Queensland Government could consider the pros and cons of introducing new Conservation of Biodiversity legislation to complement the Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016. This would enable a property or part of a property to be conserved either under one Act or under both. This may provide more flexibility in managing land conserved under the Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016. The two Acts would over-lap to some extent.

Recommendation 19. The Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 could very usefully include the Queensland Government setting up a social media page to assist the **marketing** of properties conserved under the Act. At present, especially in some regions, buyers can have difficulty finding suitable conserved properties, while sellers of conserved properties can have difficulty finding suitable buyers. The advantage of using social media is its ability to contact large numbers of people.

Recommendation 20. The present Queensland Government should move against the **combination** of:

- an over-production of some food crops, and
- some very low prices paid to the grower or producer especially by big buyers.

This **combination** raises consumer prices, quite apart from having adverse impacts on farming families and the environment. Government attention to this combination will complement the Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016.

To complement the new Act, some farmers and horticulturists would much appreciate a government interest in this matter of prices.

Government should look closely at the, “We will buy a percentage (10% for example) of your food crop at a good price, but only if you agree to destroy the remainder of your crop and don’t sell any to anyone else.” Government should investigate the extent to which the grower and producer of staple foods can receive a minimum percentage of the retail price.

ATTACHMENT 1 TO THIS SUBMISSION

This **Attachment 1** discusses:

- the sorts of popular arguments against an effective Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 likely to circulate in rural communities, and
- how to communicate with and raise public awareness within rural communities about an issue such as the new Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016.

A basic question: “Why conserve native vegetation?”

The public awareness campaign for the Vegetation Management Act 1999 was under-powered which made the Act and the government vulnerable. This should not be repeated.

The basic question “Why conserve native vegetation?” can’t be dodged. The new Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 inevitably will raise questions about why native vegetation on private land should be conserved. Reasons for conserving biodiversity and native ecosystems through legislation such as the new Act generally fall into three categories or “baskets”:¹

- **Practical benefits** – for example, native riparian vegetation including plants such as *Lomandra* can protect creekbanks and riverbanks against soil erosion. Using such riparian plants can be far less expensive than building structures to manage erosion, or cleaning up creeks and rivers after damage. Again, having insects eat weeds can be more effective and cheaper than applying herbicides.
- **Ecological benefits** – native ecosystems including plants, fauna, fungus, lichens, and the soil micro-flora and micro-fauna contribute significantly to the natural cycles that together maintain all life forms, and ultimately life upon planet Earth. It’s a sort of everything is connected to everything else. For example, having vegetation protect the catchments and banks of streams and rivers flowing into the Great Barrier Reef lagoon benefits the Reef.
- **Ethical beliefs** – these are usually from religious or philosophical beliefs. The basic question ethics aims to answer is, “What is the good?”. This involves questions such as “What is good behaviour?” with obvious implications for best practice in managing land.

Everybody has ethics – for example, I recall an elderly farmer saying he aimed to pass on his farm in a better condition than he found it, and he subsequently found a buyer who shared his viewpoint.

Ethics are always based upon some foundation that may not always be self-evident to the person or community.

¹ Mark Butz (1985) “Trees and Other Wildlife”, Chapter 4, Think Trees, Grow Trees, AGPS, Canberra, page 52

A common Post-Modern belief nowadays is “Whatever works for me is good”. This a foundational belief based upon the philosophy of some intellectuals.

The Christian idea of “stewardship” can refer to land. Within the Judeo-Christian tradition, the opening lines of Psalm 24 in the Scottish Psalter published in the year 1650 illustrate an ethical approach:

The earth belongs unto the Lord,
And all that it contains;
The world that is inhabited,
And all that there remains.

Finally, in communicating the new Act to the public the Government should avoid over-reliance upon one or a few controversial issues – such as presenting the Act **solely** as a response to accelerating global climate change. At present the global climate is warming, but **over-reliance** upon this to promote the new Act may be vulnerable to a public perception that the climate does change over time from warmer to cooler – so why get all excited about it?

For example, when Norse settlers from Scandinavia reached Greenland and eastern Canada from about the year 1000 the climate there seems to have been somewhat warmer than now. Subsequently, a temporary cooling of the climate in southern Greenland (and possibly elsewhere also) may have been one factor contributing to the decline of these settlements.

Some opposing arguments

Arguments opposing long-term conservation of native vegetation on areas of privately-owned land can often be grouped in four “baskets” or categories:

- **Category 1** refers to general policy – looking at the **consequences**, and at questions such as “Where will this kind of conservation lead?” and “What future problems for agriculture, real estate, roads and mines will such conservation bring?” Such general “blanket” objections to the new Act are likely to oppose all long-term conservation projects on privately-owned land, irrespective of any particular project or site.
- **Category 2** refers to the specific area conserved and to the type of land-use at the conserved site – reasons against the long-term conservation of one site may not apply at another conserved site. Alternative use(s) of the conserved site is often influential.
- **Category 3** refers to individual personalities and community cultures, and to how people understand their cultural identity: “This is who I am”.
- **Category 4** refers to political fund-raising and to (entirely legal but often unpublicised) talking about politics and money – this may be entirely legal pursuit of advantages.

These four categories are discussed briefly below.

Category 1: General policy objections to vegetation conservation on privately-owned land

Arguments opposing conservation of biodiversity on privately-owned land can vary from district to district and from site to site. However, popular arguments opposing an effective new Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 that are likely to circulate in rural communities (often as “defeaters” discussed below) would include:

1. The environment is a resource, like any other natural resource, and so each environmental conservation project must produce a good cash flow. If any environmental project doesn't, it must be replaced by some economic activity that does.
2. To understand “environmental conservation” as “conservation of biodiversity” just creates obstacles for economic activities such as agriculture, road construction and real estate development. Environmental conservation, understood correctly, is just one aspect of such economic activities – it is one part of a total economic package producing much-needed profitability and wealth.
3. Environmental conservation is waste – waste of time, money and other resources.
4. Fertile well-watered land must be used to produce food. Other land can be used for other activities such as housing and roads. Land useless for anything else can then justifiably be used to conserve wildlife. So everybody wins.
5. Farming does NOT exclude wildlife. For example, birds such as Magpies, Crows, Rainbow Lorikeets and hawks are often seen in farmland. The Mopoke Owl can regularly be heard calling at night.
6. Animals such as sheep and cattle that are farmed are not wildlife. Animals not farmed such as kangaroos, wild pigs, flying foxes and feral dogs are wildlife and must be controlled.
7. Conserved areas are not looked after; they produce pest animals and weeds.
8. Privately-owned (non-government) land should not be set aside for environmental conservation purposes on a **long-term** or **permanent** basis – such as by a voluntary conservation covenant on the land's title that binds present and future owners. Any conservation covenant on privately-owned land must end when ownership of that land changes.
9. There will be uncommon exceptions to 8. above (such as when a very rare endangered species or plant community is found on private land) but these unusual rare cases can be considered on a case by case basis.
10. If land has a permanent conservation covenant that binds present and future owners, Government needs a quick and easy way (without fuss and bother) to remove that covenant if the land is wanted for some economic purpose – for example, real estate development, high value farming, irrigated horticulture, or construction of infrastructure such as roads. In this belief, land must be “permanently” conserved for environmental purposes only until it is wanted for another purpose.
11. Government should be able (without fuss and bother) to remove any conservation covenant that binds present and future owners if the conserved land is being impacted by nearby properties. For example, the conservation covenant should be removed if

toxic sprays from horticulture drift or wash onto the conserved land. Such impacts originating off-site show the land is unsuitable for conservation.

12. My land is zoned Rural Protected (Category 1) which is the highest level of protection under the Vegetation Management Act 1999, but (in this belief system) any land zoned Rural is actual or potential farmland. So (in this belief system) my land is farmland and will always remain farmland. Yes, my land is “permanently protected” but what is permanently protected is agricultural land, and agriculture can resume on it at any time.
13. In an economic crisis such as a drought, graziers should be able to lease areas of national parks for grazing livestock. Everybody should have access to national parks. Similarly, graziers and others should be able to lease or use permanently conserved land for economic purposes as grazing livestock or harvesting wood.

Category 2: Site-specific features of a privately-owned conserved area

The second “basket” of arguments against long-term conservation of areas on privately-owned land can come from **the specific site** that is conserved by the new Act. This “basket” often depends on alternative uses of the site.

For example, some riparian land conserved under the new Act may have potential as a dam site, but other conserved sites don’t have this potential. Somebody wanting to build a dam could regard such conservation as wasting a dam site – a wish to avoid such waste probably contributes some opposition to conservation of biodiversity.

So site-specific factors come into play and often vary with the type of land use (including agriculture) present within the surrounding area.

Category 3: Personalities and cultures

People are different. I recall a man who did his PhD on Australian native frogs, and he told me that people often asked him how come he picked frogs – he said he was interested in frogs. Personalities differ. Cultures and sub-cultures differ. I recall South East Asia in the 1960s where different ethnic groups had marked cultural differences. Some people and sub-cultures are more aggressive than others and often follow the old saying, “Attack is the best method of defence”. Personality clashes occur.

Situations often arise where a better aim is to change cultures. For the new Act and for native vegetation in the rural landscapes, aiming for some changes in the prevailing cultures would seem more beneficial than aiming for changes by a few individuals.

Australia has shown an ability to run some very successful cultural change programs. For example, the ongoing government programs to change Australia from a tobacco-smoking society towards a non-smoking society has been relatively effective by world standards. Some Australians still smoke tobacco but percentages are well below what they once were. In general, smoking tobacco has become less socially acceptable.

Other cultural change programs in Australia have focused on unemployed youth.

Other cultural change programs have been focused on communities where by Australian standards the consumption of alcohol, addiction to gambling, neglect of children and levels of violence are relatively high. Such sub-cultures can mean that family income and expenditure patterns do not allow adequate diets for children, and such sub-cultures do not necessarily provide young males with suitable role models for doing well in a wider society. In such situations, programs aiming for cultural change can potentially bring more benefits than programs aiming for change by some individuals.

However, cultural change programs must always be based on a genuine concern for the well-being of people within those communities – for example, adverse health effects from smoking tobacco are documented. A program to change how the culture perceives conservation of biodiversity has to be based on a firm foundation – the program “has to have its feet on the ground”.

Category 4: fund-raising for worthy causes including elections

What has the new Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment 2016 got to do with political parties and groups fund-raising for elections and other worthy causes? Any political campaign has to be funded one way or another whether that campaign be to save the whales, better protect nesting shorebirds, have koalas listed as an endangered species, or elect somebody to government office.

Such fund-raising certainly need not be illegal – heaps of people and organisations (including the Salvation Army) collect funds. Lots of organisations look for opportunities to raise funds for worthy causes. Some fund-raising campaigns can produce either blanket opposition to conservation of biodiversity on privately owned land, or opposition to such conservation on specific sites.

Post-Modernism

Post-Modernism is a general term for an intellectual outlook that has especially prevailed on the university campus from about the mid-1950s. Post-Modernism followed on from the collapse of the Modern confidence in the ability of Rationalism to deliver neutral objective truth that has 100% certainty. From the 1950s this Post-Modern outlook spread widely within Western society, and the rate of spread accelerated in the 1960s and 1970s.

Nowadays, this intellectual outlook can often be recognised in many places on the campus, in media, in entertainment and through social media. The new Act will operate within a milieu much influenced by Post-Modernism.

Interpretations of what Post-Modernism really is can vary greatly, and just who are its true interpreters and true believers is often bitterly contested. In general, Post-Modernism requires a commitment to and even a preoccupation with pluralism and relativism. Some would say that

this is a big advance for environmental conservation, but in my experience this is not necessarily the case at all.

A Post-Modern preoccupation with pluralism and relativism can lead to an “Everything is disposable” belief which sees no need to conserve biodiversity because, “Everything is always changing. Why bother!” This is often a belief rather than an appeal to evidence – we are here dealing with different belief systems. Similarly, from the 1960s Australian society in general replaced marriage by totally disposable relationships. Everything changes.

Another Post-Modern belief I have experienced is that conservation of biodiversity may be regarded as nothing more than personal opinion – and one person’s personal opinion or belief about such conservation is no better or worse than any other person’s personal opinion or belief. In this Post-Modern belief, a person’s self is the only instrument s/he has for evaluating whatever is “out there” and environmental conservation can only be individual personal choice. A striking feature I have noticed especially among many Baby Boomers and subsequent generations is the saying, “Truth is whatever works for me”.

Such beliefs and ways of thinking can be Post-Science and can lead to Nihilism and Solipsism.

Communicating with the public

Communicating with the public on the new Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 is best regarded as an ongoing process with recognisable stages rather than just a collection of one-off events. Any communication campaign like this can be focused upon:

1. People’s behaviour (What they do), or
2. What people believe and think, or
3. How people feel – people’s feelings usually “think” in symbols (What does this symbolise or mean for me?) rather than logic, or
4. Usually some combination of these – the above three are different but inter-related ways by which people relate to whatever is “out there”. These three (usually in some combination) tell a person that something is going on between her/him and the outside world.

On a particular issue such as conservation of biodiversity on private land, and at a particular time/space:

- **Behaviour** dominates some people and communities, including “We have always done it this way” and “Our machinery needs open space to work quickly”,
- **Feelings** dominate other people and communities, including “Those greenies should be taught a lesson they will never forget”,
- **Beliefs and thinking** dominate other people and communities, including “People have a total right to do what they want on their own land”.

On a particular issue, whichever one of these three dominates at that time in a person or community typically take the other two along with it. The two that are weaker at that time and place follow the stronger. Also, women typically communicate to convey feelings whereas men typically communicate to convey information – women typically use more words than men in this communication.

In addition, what people in the community **know** about the issue is often very influential – their **knowledge base** on the particular issue also influences the sort of communication process a government program uses.

Because circumstances (such as the timing, place and people) differ, the Queensland Government can choose various selections and combinations of the above as the basis for their public communication program to raise public awareness about the new Act. Choosing which one of the above three to emphasise, and which combination of these three to use, is not necessarily obvious at first glance.

For example, what combination(s) of the three options listed above could a government choose for a 10-minute TV program to have people in a Shire more aware of the need to manage weeds? More aware of what an ecological niche is? More aware of what the ecological term “connectivity” refers to in a landscape?

The Left and Far Left often go directly for the first option (1) listed above – which is changing people’s behavior. This behavior-change (1) option has both advantages and disadvantages, and strengths and weaknesses.

Sketched below are some notes on a communication strategy based on what people believe and think, which is option (2) in the list above.

A communication strategy built around option (2) above

Four stages in a progressive communication process can be recognised.

Stage 1 Explain what the new Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2016 is and will do, and how and why. If the government does not do this Stage 1, the new Act will be unintelligible to many rural people and many other voters. Many people simply won’t understand the Act – which leaves them vulnerable to the “defeaters” noted in (b) below.

Stage 2 Deal with popular “common sense” beliefs known as “defeaters” that oppose the new Act – people who believe one or more of the “defeaters” won’t believe the Act because it won’t be “common sense” for them.

A “defeater” is a belief, let’s call it Belief A. How a defeater works is that if a person/voter believes a “defeater” Belief A, then s/he won’t believe Belief B – because Belief B won’t make “common sense” for him or her. That is, the credibility of Belief A the “defeater” is greater (for her/him or the community) than is the credibility of Belief B. It’s a question of which belief has more “common sense” credibility for that individual person or that community of people.

For example, a voter may believe (Belief A a “defeater”) that global climate change is a lot of nonsense invented by public servants to give themselves jobs. S/he may also believe that the new Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 (a Belief B) is based entirely upon stopping global climate change. If s/he believes that combination, how then will s/he respond when the government asks her to personally support the new Act with her behaviour?

In this example, her/his beliefs about global climate change act as a “defeater” against the new Act – so supporting the new Act will not make “common sense” for her/him. The person’s rejection of the new Act is based on credibility and belief rather than evidence – one credibility is stronger than and dominates another credibility. It’s a matter of what people believe and are prepared to believe.

It is necessary for the government to identify and address the “defeaters” that work against public acceptance of the new Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2016. To use an analogy, the government must recognise that in explaining the new Act to the public it is not writing upon a blank sheet.

Stage 3 Explain the new Act from within the beliefs and viewpoints common in rural, regional and “small town” communities. People in urban and semi-urban communities should not be excluded from the communication process.

In this Stage 3 of the process of communication, as much as possible communication from government should avoid being based on the government’s view of rural landscapes but based on rural communities’ views of rural landscapes. The aim is to have the new Act make “common sense” to a majority of people within rural communities – without forgetting other sorts of communities such as urban and semi-urban communities.

Stage 4 Ask people within rural, regional and urban communities for their personal support for the Act – that is, ask them to change their behavior in some way(s). Ask them to do some desired behavior. This is a final stage of the communication process (not an early stage) and can be followed by a review and assessment of where the communication process has reached.

In any government program aiming for greater public awareness outcomes, the most likely big mistake with this 4-stage strategy that emphasizes thinking/beliefs is to briefly sketch (1) then skip (2) and (3) and quickly move to (4). If this is done and stages (2) and (3) are skipped, the information program will usually fail.

An analogy may help illustrate this four-stage communication process sketched above. Communication with an individual can sometimes be this sort of process that progresses through recognizable stages. For example, if a person is struggling with an issue and feeling very angry or sad, the best way to communicate may not be to straight away tell them what they should do – that is, go straight to behavior or Stage 4 above. Some discussion at earlier stages is often needed before the person is ready for Stage 4.

Use of different communication models for the new Act

Especially because of public awareness issues that the 1999 Act met with, I would like the Queensland Government to take advice on how to present or “market” the new Act – talk to MPs including rural and regional MPs, talk to Land for Wildlife people, talk to experienced landholders, and seek technical advice from other people including marketing people also.

I favour the Queensland Government trying out more than one communication model to “market” and present the new Act. Try six different communication strategies and models and compare them to see how well each has worked. For example, perhaps one model could be trialed in the Sunshine Coast hinterland, another in Bundaberg, another in Mackay and a fourth in Cairns. The outcomes could then be compared one with another, and the strengths and weaknesses recognised.