



**MACKAY CONSERVATION GROUP**

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**The Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation  
Amendment Bill 2016: Submission by Mackay Conservation Group**

22<sup>nd</sup> April 2016

**Impact of increased clearing on CO2 emissions: land clearing surge in Queensland set to wipe out  
Direct Action gains**

Land clearing in Queensland, along with weakening land clearing laws in several other states, is threatening Australia's chances of meeting the climate change targets it pledged in Paris last year.

A CO2 study, commissioned by the Wilderness Society, shows extensive increased clearing allowed under legal changes under the previous Newman government could wipe out emission reductions bought by the Turnbull government's Direct Action Emissions reduction scheme that would jeopardise Australia's chances of meeting its promise to reduce greenhouse emissions by 26-28 per cent by 2030.

Over its first two auctions the ERF paid around \$670 million to purchase 51 million tonnes of land sector greenhouse gas abatement, according to the Clean Energy Regulator. Much of that was avoided tree clearing.

In 2013-14, 300,000 hectares were cleared in Queensland alone, double the rate in 2011-12. Between 2012 and 2015 land clearing emissions in Australia rose 11 times faster than any other sector.

Queensland government data released in 2015 revealed a far higher rate of clearing than what the federal government reported. The rate of clearing would take national land clearing emissions to 55 million tonnes (i.e. an additional emission of 118 million tonnes of carbon dioxide) a year between 2020 and 2030 if nothing is done. That represents a blowout of over 10 per cent on the reductions the federal government pledged to make by 2030 in the Paris Agreement in December 2015.

Thousands of hectares have been cleared in our region alone. We have received many complaints from the public about large-scale land clearing and referred these to the present Queensland government. Two weeks ago a nurse who is retiring soon came into our office to join Mackay

Conservation Group and volunteer because she was so shocked at driving through kilometres of cleared lands cleared under permits given by the Newman government.

### **Biodiversity Losses:**

Large scale permitted clearing has occurred under the Newman government's changes to the Vegetation Management Act's legislation apparently under possible breaches of the federal Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. But the federal government has failed to investigate. The best approach to such biodiversity losses is a preventative one, with clearing permits not provided where biodiversity losses would be unsustainable.

There were three National Parks in our region of northern Central Queensland where large numbers of cattle were allowed to enter and graze. This was under drought conditions when these parks were already under stress. Whole areas were left bare of vegetation as shown by images taken by Paul Donatiu then CEO of the National Parks Association of Queensland. Such activities amount to vandalism and should not be allowed by any government.

The apparent nod by the former Queensland government to inappropriate land clearing also sent a message to those who would clear illegally. Along our section of the Great Barrier Reef coast endangered ecosystems in a GBR catchment around an old aquaculture permitted area were suddenly cleared with clearing extending into mangroves and an adjacent nationally listed wetland. Such actions are now costing the taxpayer thousands of dollars and government staff time to prosecute.

### **Support for the Bill**

We support the Bill because it:

1. Removes the ability to get a clearing permit to clear High Value Agriculture, and thus stop large-scale clearing of remnant woodlands. Our concerns are the present lack of regard to biodiversity losses and other environmental damage from broad scale clearing.
2. Restores protections for ecologically important re-growing woodlands ('High Value Regrowth') on freehold and Aboriginal land. Consideration should be given to affected land owners of the contribution they are making to the public good in order to encourage compliance and reduce the levels of animosity that now exist between the agricultural sector and society e.g. making such areas Nature Refuges; rates relief etc.
3. Restores protections for trees next to riverbanks ('riparian areas') and extending provisions from some to all Great Barrier Reef catchments. See also comments in item 2 for recognition of the contribution the land owner would be making.
4. Removes the defence of claimed mistaken clearing, and restores the *starting* presumption that a landholder is responsible for clearing that takes place on their property. It should be made clear in land transaction documents and elsewhere where relevant, just what the landholder's responsibilities are and why as we realise people can make mistakes, and we are getting more foreign and out of state investors in broadscale agriculture. Even our regional council cleared undergrowth in an endangered ecosystem in the urban area of Mackay and they should have known better. An ongoing information campaign as to a landowner's responsibilities will be necessary.
5. It makes much of the prospective legislation retrospective to 17 March, in an attempt to deter panic clearing and panic applications.

Sincerely,  
Mrs. Patricia Julien M.A. M.S.



Research Analyst  
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