

Dr Joan Vickers

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Toowoomba, Qld 4350

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Research Director
Agriculture and Environment Committee
Parliament House
BRISBANE QLD 4000
Email: vminquiry@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Chair and Committee Members

Submission to Committee on Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016

The Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 offers Australia the opportunity for great improvement of vegetation management in Queensland, compared to the situation left by Campbell Newman's government. Queensland has long had a problem with massive broad scale clearing of vegetation. Since the early 2000's, Labor governments have succeeded in increasing levels of vegetation protection. Annastacia Palaszczuk's Government intends to reverse the Newman government's loosening of restrictions on clearing, but so far nothing much has happened and there has been quite a lot of clearing since they have taken power (EDO), So, it is very important to pass this legislation ASAP.

The important changes to the existing legislation are (The Wilderness Society):

- Permits to clear "High Value Agriculture" land cannot be so easily obtained, therefore large scale clearing of remnant woodlands can no longer be so readily carried out.
- Ecologically important regrowth remnant woodlands are again protected, on freehold and Aboriginal land.
- Protection is restored to riparian areas, and all (rather than some) Great Barrier Reef catchments.
- The mistake of fact (or, 'oops') defense for clearing can no longer be used, and the landholders themselves are responsible for any clearing they carry out.
- The legislation would be retrospective to 17 March, which should deter panic clearing.

These provisions should prevent much of the clearing of ecologically valuable vegetation which would otherwise occur, and in addition diminish carbon emissions.

Campbell Newman's government removed the requirement for "offsetting" "unavoidable" clearing with equivalent ecosystems that ensure "adequate conservation outcomes for prescribed environmental matters" (quoted from the Bill). The new legislation would reinstate this requirement. The Environmental Offsets Act is to be amended to require offsets for any, rather than significant, residual impacts, and payment into Queensland's offset account for anything required under Federal legislation.

This issue needs to be carefully considered. There is abundant evidence that offsetting does not work, in many situations. There are examples from Western Australia, NSW and Queensland. There are many examples of places where offsetting could logically not work.

In my view, we must support this new legislation, because it is so much better than what we currently have to protect valuable Australian ecosystems from broad scale clearing. Land clearing in Queensland has been a travesty – historically and up to the present time.

But I would like to see the clauses about offsets re-evaluated, with more emphasis on conservation and less enthusiasm for offsets. If land is indeed of high ecological value, then it should be made immune to being “unavoidably” destroyed.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Joan E Vickers

