Submission No. 348

Submission to Agriculture and Environment Committee concerning The Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and other legislation Amendment Bill

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Misleading spin by agencies

The Agriculture and Environment Committee has been provided with very misleading data. The information provided by the agencies has been selected to produce a certain result, rather than a fair and unbiased presentation.

In the transcription of The Public Briefing – Examination of the Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and other legislation Amendment Bill (22 March 2016), in response to questions, Mr Hinrichsen states "…that figure was 296,300 (ha of clearing for all types of vegetation)…".

However, the Executive Summary of the SLATS[1] report to which he referred states that 32% of this included land that had been previously cleared. Extending this, the figure should be 201,500ha, not 296,300ha as shown in Table 1 below.

The same reference also states "…Some examples of woody vegetation include undisturbed and disturbed native woodlands, timber plantations and exotic species…". I haven't found reference to the area of timber plantations that were either cleared or planted. Do chinee apple and other exotic plants register in the mapping as woody vegetation?

Similarly, what is the area of mulga cleared for stock survival feeding? The report talks of Mulga Lands, but not of actual areas cleared for stock survival fodder.

Table 1; *Extension of data provided by government departments*

Period	**Total cleared**	**Previous Clearing** %	**Previous Clearing** ha	**New clearing** ha	**Mulga Lands** ha	**Other clearing** ha
2012-13	266191	40	106 476	159 715	71 154	88 561
2013-14	296324	32	94 824	201 500	111 477	90 023

[1] Queensland Department of Science, Information Technology and Innovation. 2015. Land cover change in Queensland 2012–13 and 2013–14: a Statewide Landcover and Trees Study (SLATS) report. DSITI, Brisbane

It appears that the area of remnant vegetation is measured by various scientific means. This measured area is then deducted from the total land area of the State of Queensland and the area remaining is assumed to have been cleared. This is very misleading, as there are many areas described as treeless plains, and these areas are included in the land described as having been cleared.

As a member of the Burdekin Basin Water Resource Plan Community Reference Panel (CRP) I was shocked when, during a Power Point presentation, the convener of the Technical Advisory Panel (TAP) showed two images separately at different times and each time said "…you can see this land has been cleared…". In each case a member of the CRP identified the scene and stated that each was a treeless plain and had never had a tree on it. This shows that the scientists do not recognise that large areas exist without trees. Instead, they have the belief that, if there are no trees to be seen, the landholders must have cleared them.

It makes much more sense to include other readily available information, such as the *Percentage of Remnant Vegetation in Queensland, 2013 by Subregions* shown below in Figure 1.

Figure 2 shows the *Average Annual Clearing Rate by Subregions (2011-2013*), and Table 1, *Vegetation clearing rates*, and Table 2 *Remnant vegetation areas.*

Figures 1 and 2, and Tables 1 and 2 were found on the State Government web site https://publications.qld.gov.au/dataset/nrm-areas-remnant-veg/resource/.

Figure 3; *Percentage of remnant vegetation in Queensland by natural Resource Management Regions* provides a much better indication of the remnant vegetation situation. This is from the same web site.

Some of the comparisons that have been touted around in the media, such as '…the area cleared in the last year, 300,000ha, is twice as large as Brisbane and ten times as large as Rockhampton…" are ridiculous. Why compare cities with land areas. A more relevant comparison (land to land) is 296,300ha is less than one Queensland grazing lease, Strathmore at 931,000ha. Further, 300,000ha is 0.16% of Queensland's total area of 1.853million km^2.

Figure 1.

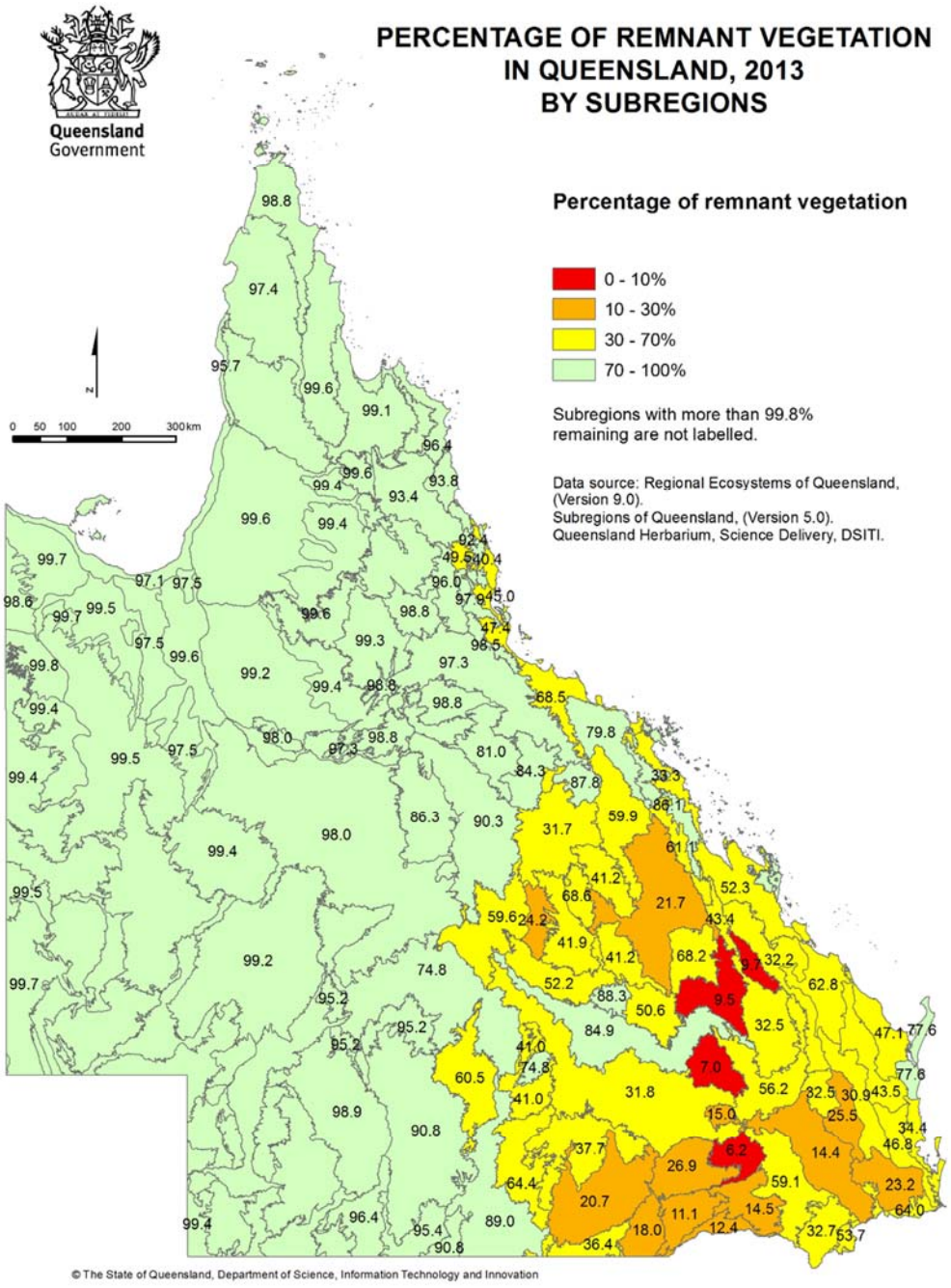
Queensland Government
PERCENTAGE OF REMNANT VEGETATION IN QUEENSLAND, 2013 BY SUBREGIONS
Percentage of remnant vegetation
0 - 10%
10 - 30%
30 - 70%
70 - 100%
Subregions with more than 99.8% remaining are not labelled.
Data source: Regional Ecosystems of Queensland, (Version 9.0).
Subregions of Queensland, (Version 5.0).
Queensland Herbarium, Science Delivery, DSITI.
0 50 100 200 300km
© The State of Queensland, Department of Science, Information Technology and Innovation

Figure 2.

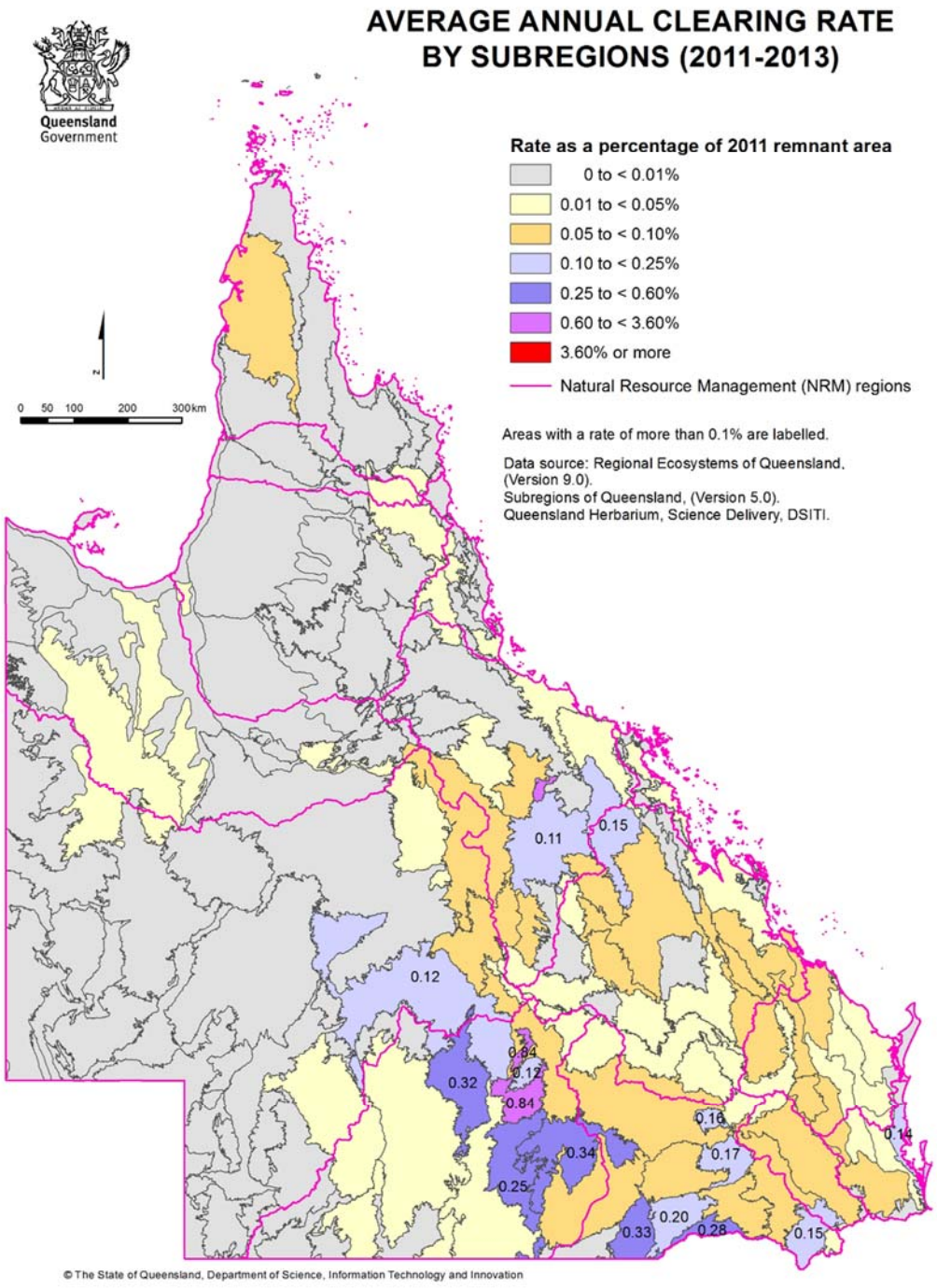
AVERAGE ANNUAL CLEARING RATE
BY SUBREGIONS (2011-2013)
Queensland
Government
Rate as a percentage of 2011 remnant area
0 to < 0.01%
0.01 to < 0.05%
0.05 to < 0.10%
0.10 to < 0.25%
0.25 to < 0.60%
0.60 to < 3.60%
3.60% or more
Natural Resource Management (NRM) regions
0 50 100 200 300km
Areas with a rate of more than 0.1% are labelled.
Data source: Regional Ecosystems of Queensland, (Version 9.0).
Subregions of Queensland, (Version 5.0).
Queensland Herbarium, Science Delivery, DSITI.
0.11
0.15
0.12
0.32
0.84
0.12
0.84
0.34
0.25
0.16
0.17
0.14
0.20
0.33
0.28
0.15
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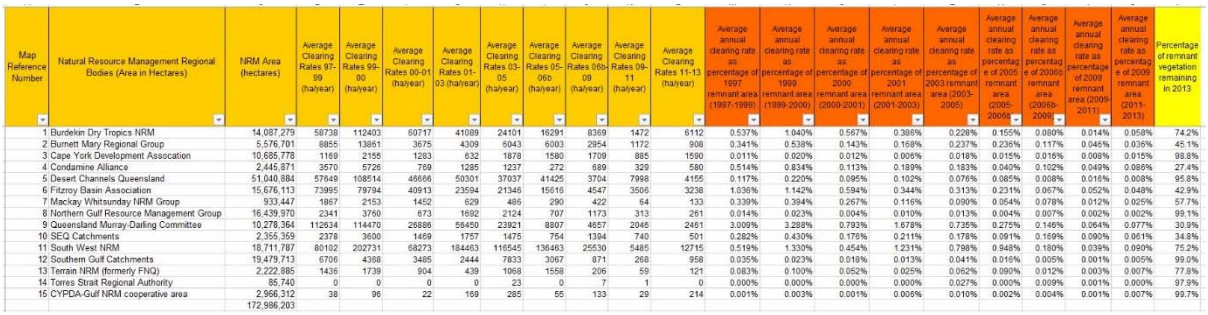
Table 1; Vegetation clearing rates



Map Reference Number	Natural Resource Management Regional Bodies (Area in Hectares)	NRM Area (hectares)	Average Clearing Rates 97-99 (ha/year)	Average Clearing Rates 99-00 (ha/year)	Average Clearing Rates 00-01 (ha/year)	Average Clearing Rates 01-03 (ha/year)	Average Clearing Rates 03-05 (ha/year)	Average Clearing Rates 05-06b (ha/year)	Average Clearing Rates 06b-09 (ha/year)	Average Clearing Rates 09-11 (ha/year)	Average Clearing Rates 11-13 (ha/year)	Average annual clearing rate as percentage of 1997 remnant area (1997-1999)	Average annual clearing rate as percentage of 1999 remnant area (1999-2000)	Average annual clearing rate as percentage of 2000 remnant area (2000-2001)	Average annual clearing rate as percentage of 2001 remnant area (2001-2003)	Average annual clearing rate as percentage of 2003 remnant area (2003-2005)	Average annual clearing rate as percentage of 2005 remnant area (2005-2006b)	Average annual clearing rate as percentage of 2006b remnant area (2006b-2009)	Average annual clearing rate as percentage of 2009 remnant area (2009-2011)	Average annual clearing rate as percentage of 2009 remnant area (2011-2013)	Percentage of remnant vegetation remaining in 2013
1	Burdekin Dry Tropics NRM	14,087,279	58738	112403	60717	41089	24101	16291	8369	1472	6112	0.537%	1.040%	0.567%	0.386%	0.228%	0.155%	0.080%	0.014%	0.058%	74.2%
2	Burnett Mary Regional Group	5,576,701	8855	13851	3675	4309	6043	6003	2954	1172	908	0.341%	0.538%	0.143%	0.168%	0.237%	0.236%	0.117%	0.046%	0.036%	45.1%
3	Cape York Development Association	10,685,778	1169	2155	1283	632	1878	1580	1709	885	1590	0.011%	0.020%	0.012%	0.006%	0.018%	0.015%	0.016%	0.008%	0.015%	98.8%
4	Condamine Alliance	2,445,871	3570	5726	769	1285	1237	272	689	329	580	0.514%	0.834%	0.113%	0.189%	0.183%	0.040%	0.102%	0.049%	0.086%	27.4%
5	Desert Channels Queensland	51,040,884	57649	108514	46666	50301	37037	41425	3704	7998	4155	0.117%	0.220%	0.095%	0.102%	0.076%	0.085%	0.008%	0.016%	0.008%	95.8%
6	Fitzroy Basin Association	15,676,113	73995	79794	40913	23594	21346	15616	4547	3506	3238	1.036%	1.142%	0.594%	0.344%	0.313%	0.231%	0.067%	0.052%	0.048%	42.9%
7	Mackay Whitsunday NRM Group	933,447	1867	2153	1452	629	486	290	422	64	133	0.339%	0.394%	0.267%	0.116%	0.090%	0.054%	0.078%	0.012%	0.025%	57.7%
8	Northern Gulf Resource Management Group	16,439,970	2341	3760	673	1692	2124	707	1173	313	261	0.014%	0.023%	0.004%	0.010%	0.013%	0.004%	0.007%	0.002%	0.002%	99.1%
9	Queensland Murray-Darling Committee	10,278,364	112634	114470	25886	56450	23921	8807	4657	2046	2451	3.009%	3.288%	0.793%	1.678%	0.735%	0.275%	0.146%	0.064%	0.077%	30.9%
10	SEQ Catchments	2,355,359	2378	3600	1469	1757	1475	754	1394	740	501	0.282%	0.430%	0.176%	0.211%	0.178%	0.091%	0.169%	0.090%	0.061%	34.8%
11	South West NRM	18,711,787	80102	202731	68273	184463	116545	136463	25530	5485	12715	0.519%	1.330%	0.454%	1.231%	0.798%	0.948%	0.180%	0.039%	0.090%	75.2%
12	Southern Gulf Catchments	19,479,713	6706	4368	3485	2444	7833	3067	871	268	958	0.035%	0.023%	0.018%	0.013%	0.041%	0.016%	0.005%	0.001%	0.005%	99.0%
13	Terrain NRM (formerly FNQ)	2,222,885	1436	1739	904	439	1068	1558	206	59	121	0.083%	0.100%	0.052%	0.025%	0.062%	0.090%	0.012%	0.003%	0.007%	77.8%
14	Torres Strait Regional Authority	85,740	0	0	0	0	23	0	7	1	0	0.000%	0.000%	0.000%	0.000%	0.027%	0.000%	0.009%	0.001%	0.000%	97.9%
15	CYPDA-Gulf NRM cooperative area	2,966,312	38	96	22	169	285	55	133	29	214	0.001%	0.003%	0.001%	0.006%	0.010%	0.002%	0.004%	0.001%	0.007%	99.7%
		172,986,203																			

Table 2; Remnant vegetation areas

Map Reference Number	Natural Resource Management Regional Bodies (Area in Hectares)	NRM Area (hectares)	Remnant Extent 1997	Remnant Extent 1999	Remnant Extent 2000	Remnant Extent 2001	Remnant Extent 2003	Remnant Extent 2005	Remnant Extent 2006b	Remnant Extent 2009	Remnant Extent 2011	Remnant Extent 2013	Percentage of remnant vegetation remaining in 2013
1	Burdekin Dry Tropics NRM	14,087,279	10930671	10812879	10704006	10647810	10564377	10517256	10491590	10470232	10467310	10454986	74.2%
2	Burnett Mary Regional Group	5,576,701	2595135	2575164	2561888	2558427	2549931	2539359	2528795	2521648	2519199	2517385	45.1%
3	Cape York Development Association	10,685,778	10583417	10581656	10578897	10577737	10576413	10572859	10571115	10565761	10563898	10561205	98.8%
4	Condamine Alliance	2,445,871	694612	686560	680836	680192	677606	675168	674758	672972	672357	671146	27.4%
5	Desert Channels Queensland	51,040,884	49434983	49316627	49197791	49153627	49051516	48984816	48916197	48906761	48891598	48882943	95.8%
6	Fitzroy Basin Association	15,676,113	7145038	6986987	6892923	6860616	6814609	6770918	6747945	6736993	6730285	6723644	42.9%
7	Mackay Whitsunday NRM Group	933,447	550578	546744	543680	542288	541051	540053	539658	538566	538448	538175	57.7%
8	Northern Gulf Resource Management Group	16,439,970	16312674	16308172	16303542	16303023	16299388	16295038	16293995	16290993	16290387	16289835	99.1%
9	Queensland Murray-Darling Committee	10,278,364	3743101	3481668	3389740	3363796	3256198	3206384	3193759	3181454	3177570	3172540	30.9%
10	SEQ Catchments	2,355,359	842221	837307	833752	832487	828819	826065	824859	821372	819865	818930	34.8%
11	South West NRM	18,711,787	15420484	15248230	15049329	14987287	14612101	14392627	14178576	14111668	14101620	14075651	75.2%
12	Southern Gulf Catchments	19,479,713	19347395	19335034	19327968	19324598	19319601	19303164	19298801	19296301	19295772	19293869	99.0%
13	Terrain NRM (formerly FNQ)	2,222,885	1740001	1737072	1735218	1734489	1733519	1731452	1729196	1728672	1728555	1728309	77.8%
14	Torres Strait Regional Authority	85,740	84027	84027	84027	84027	84027	83991	83991	83967	83965	83965	97.9%
15	CYPDA-Gulf NRM cooperative area	2,966,312	2958329	2958239	2958128	2958109	2957758	2957159	2957104	2956715	2956659	2956222	99.7%

In Table 2, by comparing the column *NRM Area (ha)* with the next column, *Remnant Extent 1997*, it is clearly evident that the vast majority of total clearing occurred before 1997. Again, the data provided is misleading in that some of the areas included did not have trees on them, and so were not cleared.

Reasons for clearing

It is my understanding that the Newman government introduced the terms High Value Agriculture (HVA) and Irrigated High Value Agriculture (IHVA) in parallel with the release of irrigation water from the Flinders and Gilbert River systems. The issue of clearing would prevent landholders from taking up the water entitlements. After all, what is the point of releasing irrigation water if there is not enough land without woody vegetation?

It is a normal rule of thumb that 10ML of irrigation water is required to irrigate each hectare of the crops envisaged for the area, e.g., cotton, sorghum, pulses, corn. Then more land, probably two to three times the area irrigated is required for rotation and for the opportunity to produce a crop on rainfall, or with rain as well as irrigation.

Thus for 280,000ML of irrigation water available, 28,000ha would be irrigated, but a total area of approximately 80,000ha would be required for rotation and fallow, as well as for infrastructure such as water storage, recycling systems, roads and water delivery systems.

Contradiction

What is the point of Leanne Donaldson, Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries, Member for Bundaberg, travelling to Darwin for the Northern Australia Food Futures Conference 2016 (11-13 April) if her government is preventing development of food futures in the north by this proposed legislation? I don't know how to think about this; duplicity, expensive but fun trip (for her), certainly a waste of money, etc. I'd like a copy of her presentation. I'd also like a breakdown of her "…out and about all over Queensland and talking to people in agriculture…". Where did she go and what people did she meet and what did she say to them? The Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries is not even part of the Agriculture and Environment Committee.

How can the Minister discuss Food Futures in Queensland when her own government is trying to prevent the development of Food Futures in the north?

Other opinion

There are papers prepared by scientists such as Bill Burrows that have been ignored by the agencies. If the agencies seek to ignore papers by such highly regarded scientists, then reasons for doing so should be provided. There seems to be credible evidence that Queensland is a carbon sink, rather than a net emitter.

Failed science

In a recent development application including clearing of remnant vegetation it was shown, clearly and beyond dispute, that an area of land – approximately 300ha – shown on the mapping as wetlands could not possibly match any definition of wetlands. Yet, this area is still shown mapped as wetlands and has not been changed.

This project, which relies on some clearing of native vegetation, takes up a significant volume of Contaminated Agricultural Runoff (CAR) that would otherwise flow into the Ramsar protected and internationally important wetlands of Bowling Green Bay. This proposed law may prevent continuation of this project, and thus allow the CAR to continue to flow into Bowling Green Bay.

An example.

A farmer who has been growing potatoes successfully for more than thirty years has been asked by the company that purchase his product to increase his production.

To do this he purchased an adjoining parcel of land, some 1400ha, and intends to clear five separate areas, of 30ha each, in a mosaic pattern across the land parcel. This extension of his potato producing operation is in response to demand.

Now it seems that this extension will be prevented by the intended new law.
This is an excellent development and should be supported.

Australia's population is growing and predicted to keep growing at the same rate. This increases the demand for food production, and is the case in this example. I.e. increased population – increased demand, so increased production required to satisfy this demand.

Finally

Australia needs to increase agricultural production in order to maintain current standards of living. Other countries are seeking food security because they have known what it is like to be without food. This is why they are seeking to buy Australian land to ensure that food security.

It should not need scientists to show that native vegetation continues to grow – after all, look in your own gardens and see how much vegetation has to be removed on a regular basis.

Evidence from Queensland government sources is conflicting about the amount of vegetation being cleared.

The Vegetation Management Act (VMA) was introduced to prevent senseless clearing. The introduction of approvals for clearing for high value agriculture (HVA) and irrigated high value agriculture (IHVA) was to permit increased development in a controlled manner.

The proposed changes to the VMA are ridiculous in that they are proposed by uninformed zealots who have not shown how we, Australians, are to maintain or improve our standard of living.

Please do not allow the proposed Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and other legislation Amendment Bill to proceed.

J.N.H. Beattie BE(Hons1), MIEAust, NPER, RPEQ(1569)

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