Submission No. 389

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Dear Chair and Committee Members

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

We are retired and have had a long time interest in conservation spanning some 40 years. Col's is a trained Water Quality Technician with laboratory, field, hydrographical, and ecological experience. Bern is an experienced bookkeeper, too with some 40 years experience. We maintain membership of Native Plants Queensland (formerly The Society for Growing Australian Pants) and The Rosewood District Protection Organisation Inc. (RDPO). Our interest in the issue of land clearing is long standing and covers the Australian continent.

We support the intentions of these amendments (e.g. reduce greenhouse gas emissions by limiting clearing that resurged since 2009/10, restores regulation of High Value Regrowth (HVR), restores protections for riparian areas and extends such provisions to all Great Barrier Reef catchments, reinstates environmental offsets for any developmental residual impact.) to the Vegetation Management Act (VMA) in correcting the detrimental effects of the previous government's amendments (e.g. in the areas of Property Maps of Assessable Vegetation (PMAV) and Self Assessable Codes (SAC). However the amendments retain –

Exemptions.
There are to many exemptions and the Bill does nothing in respect of them.

- Purpose tests should be replaced by ecological impact tests. It matters not for which purpose the land was cleared. The environmental / ecological / conservation effects are of prime consideration for example water quality, erosion, species diversity etc.
- Exemptions should only be permitted if clearing is of small scale (< 0.1ha /property) and then only is outside of areas with threatened species, ecosystems or land degradation risks.

PMAVs.
Although the Bill reduces the HVR 'deprotected' by the previous government, it does not, if it was 'locked in' as an X on a PMAV.

- 'PMAV Xs' imply a right where none should exist. Such PMAVs should act only as a device that reflects ground truth / accuracy of regulatory maps.

- There should be no presumption that areas currently exempt, can never be subject to removal of such exemption if demonstrated environmental harm is significant.
- With 27% (22million ha. of Qld.) already exempt (X) under VMA, 16% (13million ha.) not yet converted to non-forest uses (crops, plantations, sown pastures etc.), land is freely available to landholders to clear as desired. The proposition that the VMA stifles agriculture is a mythical one.

SACs

The Bill leaves amendments to the codes. Constraints need to appear in the Act and not left to the codes

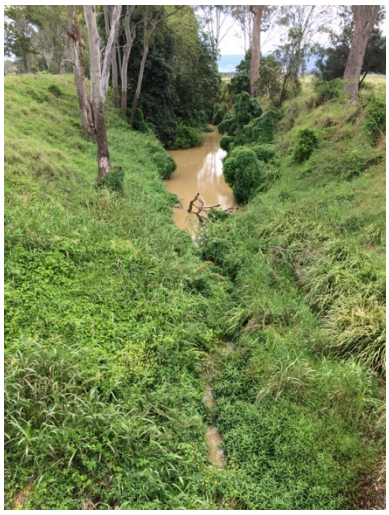
- SACs are not capped or otherwise constrained in any way to keep ecological risk within minimum boundaries.
- A current broadscale clearing loophole of major proportions, permits 'thinning' of unlimited areas with bulldozers.
- SACs should only be available where clearing is on the modest of scales (50ha or 1% of property area which ever is lesser figure) and only if no threatened species, ecosystems or land degradation risks.

HVR

The Bill retains static HVRs.

- The definition of HVR using fixed year 1989 baseline fails to keep pace with advancing age regrowth now at 20 years. A time factor needs to be introduced to the definition.

Below are several recent examples of the effects of land clearing in the Bremer R. catchment.



An example of an effect of land clearing recently observed in Bremer Catchment, was a pollution incident recorded after a rain event. The photograph shows highly turbid water flowing downstream in Western Creek (a tributary of the Bremer R near Rosewood) on the 8th November after a rain event. The pollution originated in a ploughed paddock (private property) upstream of Rosewood and was a result of the absence of riparian vegetation. Indeed absence of riparian is evident along most of the Bremer River.

Ill considered land clearing even up to 150 years still has ramifications - loss of top soil, increased organic matter and depletion of dissolved O_2 often results in fish kills.

An example of highly turbid discharge from the New Oakleigh coal mine north of Rosewood. The discharge flows under a culvert on Urry Rd. and happens each time there is a rain event. The installation of sedimentation ponds would have circumvented the problem during the mine's operation of some 12 years. Flow is by an ephemeral drainage gully to Western Cr.

Injudicious land clearing albeit from an industrial source, contributes to the increasing sediment load in local streams.

Land clearing is, along side greenhouse gas emissions, perhaps among the most pressing of environmental problems even on a global scale. Its effects, almost wholly detrimental, must now be regulated for the guidance of all.

Yours sincerely,

Colin Thompson.

Bernice Thompson.

Refs

Impact of Historical Land Cover Change on Daily indices of Climate Extremes Including Droughts in Eastern Australia. Deo, Syktus, McAlpine, Lawrence, McGowan, Phinn - 2009, Geophysical Research Letters.

"The Biggest Estate on Earth" - Bill Gammage A& U 2011.

"Dark Emu" - Bruce Pascoe Magabala Books 2014.

Appendix

A Brief History of Land Clearing – The Rosewood Scrub.

Land clearing began with the first Europeans to occupy the district in the 1830s at the expense of the local indigenous people (the Jaggera and Ugarapul). Prior to 1842 the colony was exclusively a penal one. Land clearing was limited to immediate requirements of the penal colony. With the 1842 declaration of an open colony came massive influx of Europeans requiring land.

Serious land clearing in the Rosewood district commenced as early as the late 1840s with land being quickly selected to the south of the Rosewood Scrub by English and Scottish immigrants. The first of the Irish immigrants (resulting from the Irish Potato Famine of the 1840s) selected land to the north of the Scrub in the early 1850s. By the late 1850s when the major German immigrants arrived, the land most readily available was the Rosewood Scrub, an area of impenetrable Dry Vine Rainforest 'discovered' by Alan Cunningham and extending from Rosewood to Fernvale to Coominya to Lowood and south to Minden thence to Rosewood. A person let alone riding a horse could not walk through it. By the early 1890s the scrub was substantially cleared by the German immigrants. Land clearing lead to dry land dairying, cattle grazing, and cropping.

The fragmented and remnant scrub existent today is around 1.2% of the original area. The major effect was severe saltation of the creeks flowing from the area of the Scrub and associated flood plains. Agriculture has been affected and from an environmental point of view species once common are now considered uncommon and rare. Agriculture from an economic point of view peaked in value in 1914 and has not achieved that value since. Other effects include severe erosion, rapid drying and compaction of soils, reduction of soil carbon content and accelerated runoff during floods.

It is important to note the land use practices differences. Aborigines used cold fire burns in fostering a productive landscape with biodiversity. Europeans physically removed vegetation with destructive environmental effect e.g. as well as the effects mentioned above, saltation of creeks and flood plains of various catchments with biodiversity much reduced.