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*SUBMISSION - Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016*

Australia's Commitment to Keep Global Warming Below 2 Degrees

If Australia is serious about keeping global warming below 2 degrees then not only do State Governments have to invest more in renewable energy but also need they need to start preserving more of our natural carbon sinks. Significant land disturbance is a major source of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Human disturbance has much more impact on forests than natural disturbances such as fires or cyclones. When forested land is converted to agricultural land soils are usually ploughed, graded, compacted or excavated, and then often left exposed to erosion. Forest soils are key storehouses for carbon as they store over twice as much as is stored in the wood of the trees.<sup>1</sup> As a university student, I believe that climate change is the most pressing issue that my generation will have to deal with and to see eucalypt forests being torn down for 'agricultural' profits is nonsensical. WWF's report *Climate Solutions: WWF's vision for 2050* states that unless Australia curb emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, our probability of limiting global warming to 2°C drops progressively from more than 90% to just 35%.<sup>2</sup> North Queensland soil is harsh and unforgiving and it does not make economic sense to use excess fertilizers and water to create semi-nutrient soil to grow grass and crops which would otherwise not normally grow in such harsh conditions. This Bill would successfully reduce the amount of clearing that is taking place in North Queensland and consequently place Australia on track to keep below 2 degrees of warming.

Economic argument

Natural vegetation provides ecosystem services such as cycling of water, nutrients, soil formation and maintaining the productivity of soils, pollination, dispersal of plants and natural pest control. These ecosystem services are not valued highly enough in most policy decisions made by all tiers of government. However, a study by McAlpine et al. states that the intensity and duration of drought and high temperatures in Queensland are likely to have increased due to vegetation clearing.<sup>3</sup> The long-term effects of excessive clearing need to be taken into account. Drought will cause taxpayers to pay higher fees for clean water and high temperatures will see more bushfires and worse conditions for the crops which are

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<sup>1</sup> New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. Trees: The Carbon Storage Experts. Retrieved from <http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/47481.html>.

<sup>2</sup> WWF. (2007). *Climate Solutions: WWF's Vision for 2050*.

<sup>3</sup> McAlpine, CA., Ryan, JG., Seabrook, L., Thomas, S., Dargusch, PJ., Syktus, JL., Pielke, Sr RA., Etter, AE., Fearnside, PM., Laurance, WF. (2010). More than CO<sub>2</sub>: A Broader Paradigm for Managing Climate Change and Variability to Avoid Ecosystem Collapse. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability* 2, 1.

currently being grown in North Queensland. An economic report in 2010 by John Rolfe, has also stated that the total economic value of improving the Great Barrier Reef by 10% over the next 25 years is \$6.3 billion dollars.<sup>4</sup> Further land clearing in Queensland will see even more fertiliser and soil wash into the Great Barrier Reef which is going to decimate one of the last natural wonders of the world. Protecting the Great Barrier Reef must be of the highest concerns to the Queensland Parliament because it provides a major tourist attraction for not only Australians but international tourists as well. This Bill needs to be passed in parliament so that restoration, instead of degradation of the Great Barrier Reef catchment area can occur.

### Onus of Proof and Retrospectivity

The Bill also re-introduces very important features such as removing the defence of 'mistaken clearing' and restores the presumption that a landholder is responsible for clearing that takes place on their property. This does not prejudice landholders in any way, if they would like to participate in land clearing then there should be strict guidelines for doing so and if they're not participating in land clearing then they have nothing to fear. As someone who strongly fears for the Great Barrier Reef's health I am very in favour of this Bill creating a strong barrier for landholders to partake in illegal clearing. I am also in favour of the retrospective nature of this Bill to make sure that land clearers do not quickly clear land in the interim.

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<sup>4</sup> Rolfe, J., Windle, J. and Prayaga, P. (2010). *Assessing total economic value for protecting the Great Barrier Reef*. Presented at Australian National University. Retrieved by [https://crawford.anu.edu.au/research\\_units/eeerh/workshops/network\\_symposium/pdf/presentations/day\\_one/john\\_rolfe.pdf](https://crawford.anu.edu.au/research_units/eeerh/workshops/network_symposium/pdf/presentations/day_one/john_rolfe.pdf).