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Dear Chair and Committee Members

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

My name is Tanya Golitschenko and I am both Treasurer of the Koala Action Group in the Redlands and Infrastructure Architect at MODE Design. I support the passing of the Vegetation Management Reinstatement Bill to protect Queensland's precious ecosystems and wildlife.

Protecting vegetation is crucial in protecting koala habitat. Koalas face the reality of extinction in the Koala Coast area with a decline of 68% since 1996 and an estimation that less than 1000 koalas remain in the Redlands area.

The koala is an animal of state environmental significance and yet there is little in the State legislation that protects koala habitat on private land. It actually facilitates the removal of koala trees from both the urban and rural areas, especially as demonstrated in the Redlands.

Threats to the long-term persistence of koalas are considerably higher in heavily developed areas such as South East Queensland (Natrass and Fiedler 1996; Patterson, 1996; Weigler et al. 1987). South East Queensland continues to be Australia's fastest growing region with the addition of an estimated 55,000 new residents per year over the last 20 years (Qld Government 2005). Loss of habitat is recognised as the key threatening process for koala survival, with additional threats from vehicle hits, dog attacks and an increased susceptibility to disease as a consequence of the loss and fragmentation of habitat (ANZECC 1998; Melzer et al. 2000). Unabated clearing of koala habitat for development in South East Queensland is placing a great deal of pressure on the survival of the koala. Refer "DECLINE OF THE KOALA COAST KOALA POPULATION: POPULATION STATUS IN 2008" by DERM for further information.

The Statewide Land cover and Trees Study (SLATS report) released in November 2015, showed that the rate of clearing of woody vegetation has been increasing since 2009-10 from about 78 000 hectares per year to about 296 000 hectares per year in 2013-14. In turn, this has increased carbon emission rates and risks to the Great Barrier Reef from sediment and pollutant run-off. 40 000 hectares of koala habitat was cleared between 2012 & 2014 as well as 405 000 hectares de-protected.

Although Koala protection is closest to my heart other equally important reasons to protect are vegetation include:

- protecting all other threatened species such as Eastern Curlews, Grass Parrots and Gliders
- The impact of tree clearing on increasing drought in our already drought stricken state – it has now been proven that the more trees we have, the more rain we have; this is a win for agriculture.
- The impact of tree clearing on climate change – tree clearing causes millions of tonnes of CO2 to be released into our atmosphere; warming our earth and destroying our ability to inhabit it.
- tree clearing near catchments can cause land erosion and run off into our river catchments – the erosion and run off caused by clearing along the Great Barrier Reef catchment banks is a leading cause of the detrimental bleaching and destructive impacts to our Reef.

Riparian vegetation plays an important role in reducing the sediment and nutrient runoff that enters waterways. Deteriorating water quality caused by catchment runoffs is recognised as the most immediate risk to the condition of the Great Barrier Reef. The previous government removed the vegetation clearing consideration from riverine protection permits under the Water Act which resulted in clearing of previously regulated riparian vegetation becoming unregulated.

I think the Bill is good because it:

- Removes the ability to get a permit clear for so-called High Value Agriculture, and thus stop large-scale clearing of remnant woodlands.
- Restores protections for ecologically important re-growing woodlands ('High Value Regrowth') on freehold and Aboriginal land.
- Restores protections for trees next to riverbanks ('riparian areas') and extending provisions from some to all Great Barrier Reef catchments.
- Removes the 'oops' defence of claimed mistaken clearing, and restores the starting presumption that a landholder is responsible for clearing that takes place on their property.
- It makes much of the prospective legislation retrospective to 17 March, in an attempt to deter panic clearing and panic applications.

One of many cases in Queensland of remnant clearing is the clearing of endangered remnant Brigalow forest north of Carnarvon NP, which is now under investigation.

We need to prevent the loss of biodiversity in Queensland. More than 200 000 hectares of habitat for more than 200 species has been cleared between 2012-2014 due to a lack of EPBC Act referrals. As there are currently no mitigations or offsets for broad scale clearing there is no deference.

I would like the opportunity to appear before the Committee in their hearing into this inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

Tanya Golitschenko

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27<sup>th</sup> April 2016