

Submission on the Queensland Land Clearing Reform Bill

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Anne and Lawrie Martin,

[REDACTED] Murray Upper, Qld 4854
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Research Director,
Agriculture and Environment Committee,
Parliament House, BRISBANE, QLD 4000

Dear Sir,

AS residents of the Cassowary Coast, part of which is in the Hinchinbrook Electorate of the Queensland electoral system, and with a property we have dedicated as Land for Wildlife, we resolutely recommend the Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 now before a Parliamentary committee .

When moving into this region some 12 years ago we were shocked to find continual and untrammelled broad acre land clearing had caused tremendous loss of habitat for a lengthy list of native wildlife, significantly among them the endangered Southern Cassowary and the endangered Mahogany Glider.

We were also dismayed to find in heavy rain periods the rivers in and near our district turned decidedly brown, and soon realised it was topsoil from many farmlands where once native vegetation stood proud, binding the soil over aeons of time to prevent such an event occurring.

Adding to this bitter disappointment was the realisation this topsoil, now wending its way to the Great Barrier Reef was, indeed, carrying loads of fertiliser and other chemicals liberally applied to the soil to raise the nutrient level while huge doses of insecticides are doused over growing crops to kill pest insects.

Despite these chemicals continuing to wash away each season, these deleterious actions – killing the habitat, killing soil quality and poisoning the native food chain – is similar to hitching a ride on a fertility merry-go-round. There will be no getting off until it stops.

Seemingly there is no respite and while a succession of governments, dating back to when the Minister for Forests agreed, after conferring with timber millers, to reduce the girth requirements for timber harvested on the Kirrama Range, there has been limited protection for native habitat.

Not only did we fear for the future of the world's largest living organism, the Great Barrier Reef, we also feared for the future of the unique and iconic southern cassowary and mahogany glider, both of which have exceedingly limited and diminishing habitat, so decided to do something about it.

Following the destruction caused by Tropical Cyclone Yasi in February, 2011, the opportunity arose to make contact with executives of Hancock Queensland Plantations, a large internationally-based company which had paid the Queensland Government handsomely for large areas of the State to farm plantation timber under the name, HQ Plantations.

We were acting on behalf of humanity in our approach under the name of Queensland Wildlife and agreement was reached – a memorandum of understanding signed – and action taken to rehabilitate portions of land allotted to us by HQ Plantations.

A change of government was the harbinger for trouble ahead. In one fell swoop 25 per cent of the state's working population was sacked and then a bill which totally disregarded the welfare of the environment or the need for broad habitat protection was introduced in Parliament by the then Minister for Natural Resources & Mines, Andrew Cripps.

Mr Cripps' legislation effectively tore up any protection available to native wildlife and, despite government's later protestations of it not being so, gave carte blanche to broad acre clearing which has continued apace - while community groups were involved in the back-breaking task of planting seedling trees to form wildlife corridors on HQ land in an effort to have some hope for the future of cassowaries, mahogany gliders, and others.

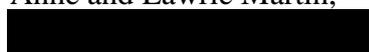
Not content with the substantial amount of land clearing being conducted under his baton, Mr Cripps approached HQ Plantations on two occasions approximately 13 months ago and conveyed to them forcibly that the company could only allow five per cent of its land to be made available for wildlife.

What was the punishment for breaching this five per cent? A total revocation of the licence.

People who care for this country, people who are prepared to do what they can to make this beautiful and unique part of the world a better place to live in, loudly say protect our environment, we only have one of them.

We join with them and earnestly request a speedy reinstatement of sane legislation which will not only protect the few wild areas left, but seek for more understanding of them to ensure their future.

Anne and Lawrie Martin,


Murray Upper, Qld 4854.