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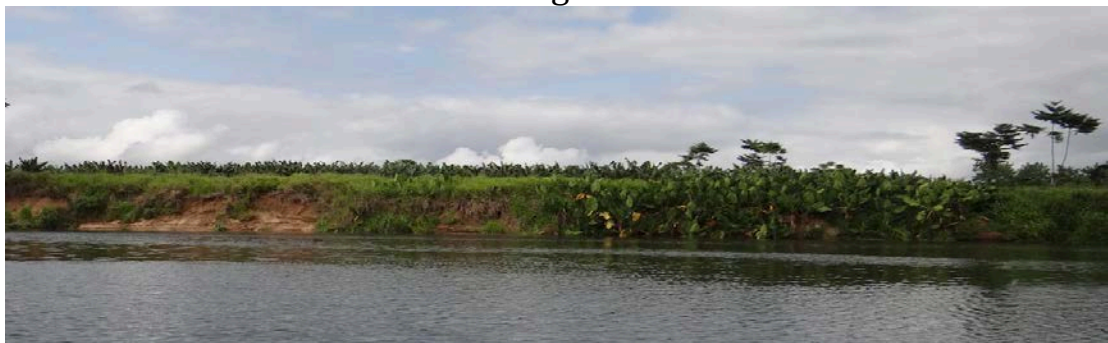
SUBMISSION ON THE VEGETATION MANAGEMENT (REINSTATEMENT) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2016.

The Cassowary Coast Alliance is represented by members who come from a wide area of the Wet Tropics Region and who themselves are small business owners, fishermen, educators, artists, farmers and blue-collar workers. We congratulate the Queensland Government for bringing forward this Bill, and respectfully provide our comments on its implementation.

Our members are very much aware of the campaign run across the media, by AgForce Queensland and the Property Council of Australia against the proposed changes to vegetation management laws. However, the evidence on the ground does not support their statements.

The loudest voices against changes to the Act are from hobby farmers who think clearing will add value to their land; farmers who are not fully utilizing already cleared land on their blocks, and people who are politically motivated.

Heavy rain this week, in the catchment areas of the Wet Tropics Rivers, has once again demonstrated the urgency for this legislation to be made law to protect the riparian vegetation along waterways that feed the Great Barrier Reef Lagoon.





Runoff from the Johnstone River, Innisfail entering the Coral Sea lagoon

All along rivers and creeks in the Wet Tropics, degraded and bulldozed riparian vegetation allows farm runoff to enter the water column and flow out to the Great Barrier Reef. The runoff carries with it suspended sediments, fertilisers, insecticides, fungicides and residual herbicides.



Aerial photographs taken in late March above the Great Barrier Reef, following a minor rain event in the Wet Tropics, clearly show the coastal runoff reaching and engulfing the coral reefs offshore from the Wet Tropics Coastline.

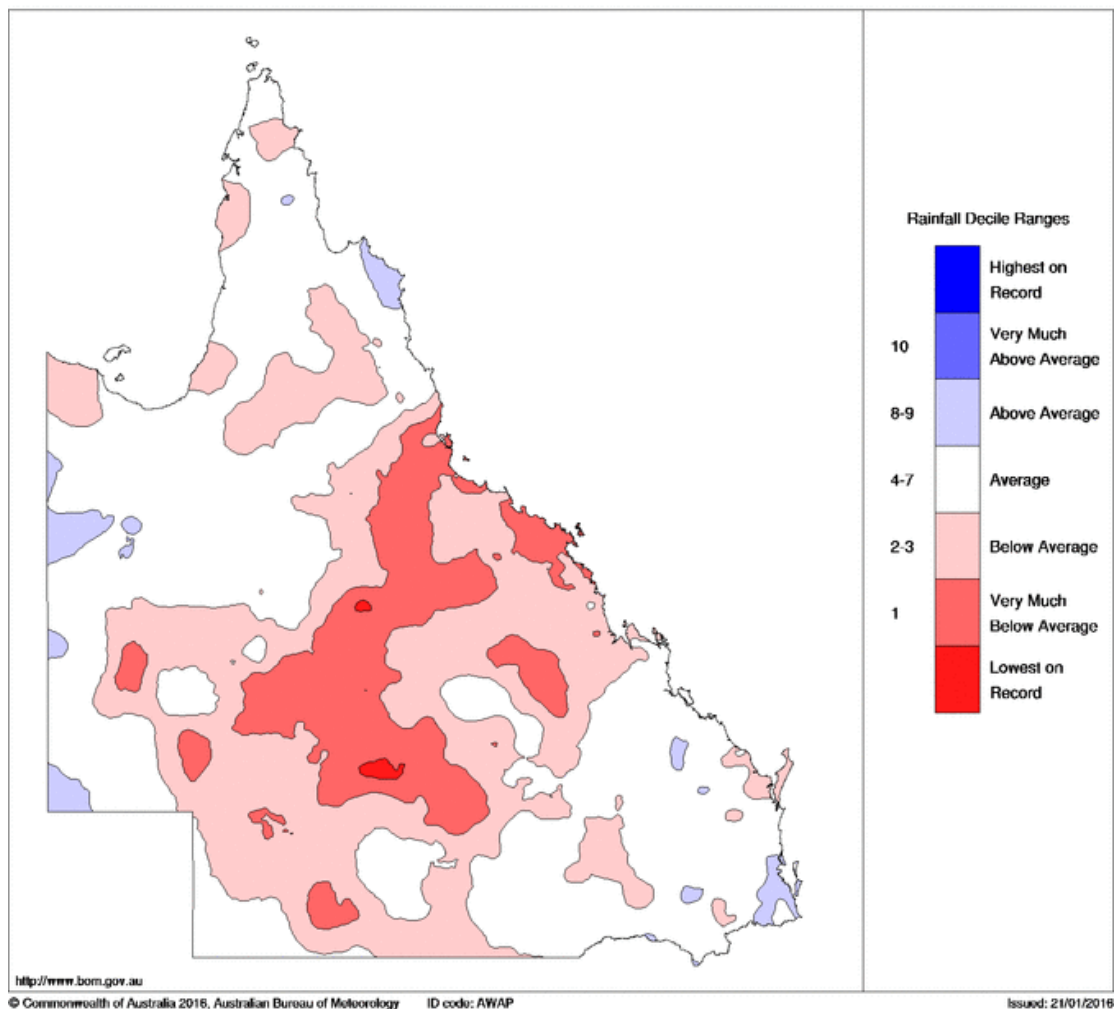


Clearing, in the Great Barrier Reef catchments, is over 100 000 hectares per year. Runoff to the Great Barrier Reef will increase with extreme rainfall events expected with the predicted return of a La Nina weather pattern during the second half of this year.

In addition, the Australian Bureau of Meteorology states; “ Australia’s climate is also being influenced by record warm temperatures in the Indian Ocean. The warmth in the Indian Ocean will likely provide extra moisture for rain systems as they cross Australia during the southern autumn.” The protection of vegetation in riparian and river catchment areas is essential in aiding the recovery of the Great Barrier Reef. Especially following the extreme coral-bleaching event this summer.

It is also crucial to protect the integrity of dam catchment areas. At a time when 85% of Queensland is in drought; Tinaroo Dam, west of Cairns, now at the end of the wet season, is on 40%. Koombbooloomba Dam west of Tully, is at an all time low for the end of wet season now recording 24% capacity. How can we consider further unfettered clearing of the catchment areas for dams?

Queensland Rainfall Deciles 1 January to 31 December 2015
 Distribution Based on Gridded Data
 Australian Bureau of Meteorology



At this time records are being broken for the hottest and driest days, months, years, ever recorded. Can we consider clearing of river catchments without due process being followed?

The Great Barrier Reef has experienced the worst coral bleaching ever recorded, caused by extreme sea surface temperatures, and exasperated by sediment runoff. Can we consider broad scale clearing of river catchments that will increase farm runoff?

At this time rare and endangered species are hanging on in shrinking habitats. Can we consider clearing these habitats without considering the impact on these endangered birds and animals?



We congratulate the Palaszczuk Government's action in presenting this Bill, that we believe will set the framework to protect the Great Barrier Reef and the endangered birds and animals of Queensland.

Yours faithfully,
Yvonne Cunningham,
Cassowary Coast Alliance.