



Milton, QLD 4064

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Research Director
Agriculture and Environment Committee
Parliament House
BRISBANE QLD 4000

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Dear Committee members,

Protect the Bush Alliance (PTBA) is an alliance of 22 NGOs and community groups in Queensland and Australia representing over 30,000 people. Our goal is to implement ways of preventing the loss of areas of high conservation values. One of the ways we do this is by conducting flora and fauna surveys on properties of high conservation value and on the properties that are connected to them. Members of PTBA have had and will continue to have, close association with many land holders and communities that occur in areas of biological and conservation significance. Many of these areas are currently affected by the major resource developments including high value agriculture planned throughout Queensland including Cape York.

The Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016.

It is worth noting the history of the vegetation management laws for which we now encourage re-instatement. Following the implementation of this legislation by a previous labour state government, land holders were supported with rural adjustment packages worth \$150million dollars including \$8million supplied to Agforce to supervise transitions from the practice of indiscriminate land clearing. Agforce said at the time it was “prepared to accept the changes”. When protections were extended to some ecologically significant regrowing woodlands (uncleared since 1989), AgForce recognised that the change “balances productive land management while maintaining biodiversity values”. In the lead up to the 2012 state election, AgForce stated “farmers and graziers have adapted extremely well to landmark Vegetation Management laws introduced in 2009”.

Contrary to this acknowledged success in transitioning to improved land care, and contradicting a commitment made by the LNP to “not reduce the statutory level of protection” on native woodlands, the Newman LNP government went ahead and permitted broadscale clearing through so-called high value agriculture permits, and deregulated high value regrowth clearing. Not only has this nullified the beneficial spending of \$150million dollars provided in these adjustment packages, but further negates the relevance and outcomes from the various carbon abatement and tree planting investments associated with the Emissions Reduction Fund, worth hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars.

The clearing of Strathmore Station and Olive Vale Station on Cape York have attracted considerable negative publicity. Now that the deed is done – we can only hope high value agriculture does in fact follow and will contribute significantly to the Queensland economy in to the future. Failure to demonstrate the justification for clearing of this magnitude, should result in ‘the chain of responsibility’ legislation recently enacted, applied to land holders. An expectation by law, to ‘make good’ the restoring of cleared land, to then be committed to eco-system protection in to the future, should be a minimum requirement.

PTBA notes the many fauna species likely impacted in the fragile systems of Cape York involved in the recent land clearing debacle. These highlight the need for re-instatement of the VMA. The safety of

the Great Barrier Reef and its catchments, Koala and the more emblematic animals of Queensland continue to be the focus of public attention.

We would like to bring particular attention to the significant biological values in Queensland's terrestrial systems which are extraordinarily diverse with many endemic species deserving of equal importance. Birds, insects, reptiles, trees and plants, running creeks and wetland systems are irreplaceable - all are negatively impacted by the clearing of land. Impacts are not restricted to media fortunate, mega-developments like Strathmore Station.

PTBA has previously brought attention to the ongoing linear clearing of woodland associated with the expansion of CSG mining projects, in this state. The granting of approvals for the Adani – Carmichael Mine, will see the whole scale clearing of Moray Downs and adjacent properties to become a corridor of destruction, stretching from the Galilee Basin to the coastal ports, fragmenting landscapes, fouling water ways and polluting air. PTBA has also been most vocal for the protection in perpetuity of Nature Refuges, being indeed 'in perpetuity', as written in land holder agreements.

The Bimblebox Nature Refuge (Glen Innes Station at Alpha) is now the subject of an application for a renewed approval by Mr Clive Palmer. We understand 'Waratah Coal' now refers to India First, rather than China First. It makes no difference – the very best parcel of Desert Uplands Bio-region, a Nature Refuge sold out to coal mining, remains a national disgrace.

If the current Labor Government is authentically serious about protecting our country from clearing - then it would be entirely fitting to immediately disallow any re-approvals for coal mining in threatened regional ecosystems like the Desert Uplands. This would protect forever, parcels of significant regional bio-diversity such as that present on 'Bimblebox Nature Refuge'.

Members of Protect the Bush Alliance whole-heartedly support the rein-statement of strong laws in this round of the VMA. We acknowledge the intent of these changes will see;

- Disallowing future applications for large-scale clearing of woodlands and remnant woodlands and appropriately valuing regrowing woodlands, deemed as 'High Value Regrowth' under all tenures.
- Appropriately values and conserves riparian edges to prevent erosion, provide healthier catchments, and avoid subsequent run off flowing to the Great Barrier Reef.
- Removes the ability to clear 'because we can' element of (mis)management.

In so saying – we acknowledge the strength of land holders throughout Queensland who manage vast properties, not only for their agricultural business but with a wisdom and foresight to preserve the very country providing their livelihoods. The security and successful stewardship of land for food production must remain a priority for governments of all persuasions.

We thank the committee for this opportunity to comment and commend the proposed changes to legislation.

Yours sincerely



Sheena Gillman

Project Coordinator PTBA.

