

Ms Ellie Bock

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Research Director
Agriculture and Environment Committee
Parliament House
BRISBANE QLD 4000

By way of email to: vminquiry@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Chair and Committee Members

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

I make this submission as a Queensland citizen and professional land use and land management planning facilitator with over 20 years experience in rural, regional and remote Queensland.

I am concerned that successive generations of Queensland politicians continue to deliberately choose to ignore the precautionary principle, never more necessary in determining the longer-term public good than now. Your Committee would do well to recall that recent State administrations have actively walked away from a due incorporation of the precautionary principle and principles of ecologically sustainable development (ESD) into the body of Queensland statute. We can no longer blithely afford to do so.

The deeply troublesome state of the global treasure that is the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) is directly attributable to the increasingly obvious impacts of human-created global warming, not the least of which is a changing climate pattern driven by excessive carbon emissions. When we destroy native vegetation to the extent that we have in Queensland over the past 200 years, the rain refuses to come, drought prevails and the fluctuations in our drought and flood cycles become ever more extreme. The current El Nino has broken all known records, with an unprecedented lack of rainfall and cloud cover across northern Queensland. The world's largest series of coral reefs 93% bleached, on our watch. Shame.

Over the last few years in particular I have watched and tracked with increasing disbelief the amount and scale of vegetation clearing taking place for continuing coal industry expansion projects, increased grazing intensity across GBR catchments, peri-urban development around our cities and towns across Queensland, at the margins of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area and in previously intact catchments and riparian systems on Cape York Peninsula for broad acre agriculture such as bananas or sorghum.

Whilst the capacity of humans to generate fulfilling and meaningful economies of purpose is important, this should not and must not come at the expense of the web of life that sustains all life on earth. We are now wholly balanced on the edge of being able to sustain these essential life support systems for our species and for many other present life forms. The science is very clear on this, and unambiguous.

I fully support pro-active government intervention and regulation of the commercial use of Queensland's natural assets as the basic public good they are, on the basis of their absolute and irreplaceable value as natural assets (including our unique biodiversity and our shared bio-cultural heritage) and their increasing scarcity and rarity. No one sector of our society has a greater call on these precious assets than any other.

The State's prerogative is to ensure these assets are sustained for future generations. This requires serious regulations and restrictions to be placed on their use and consumption now. In particular in the face of anthropogenic global warming, and its implications for our native species today.

I cannot help but be saddened and appalled at what has happened to precious remnant native vegetation in this State in the short interval of the Newman government's brief tenure. It is evident that the absolute short-sightedness of the winding back of the original VMA legislation has resulted in increased carbon emissions; increased erosion and subsequent run-off into the GBR lagoon and our other special marine areas; the exacerbated destruction and degradation of essential remnant native habitat for our iconic and other native species such as the endangered southern cassowary and koala; remnant littoral rainforest and a general disregard for the preciousness and uniqueness of our remaining native vegetation, significant parts of which are globally unique and protected in recognition of this.

As a State we have gone backwards 30 years in one fell swoop. We know in Queensland, by proven and documented experience, that reducing land clearing reduces green house gas emissions. That was the Queensland I used to be proud of. In this respect, my gravest concerns extend to the rate of clearing which has continued to take place in Queensland, the scale and rate of which is totally unacceptable and inexcusable. We continue to throw away our children's futures. This Bill is one small step in redress.

Although I believe it represents only the first step in addressing the clearing free-for-all of recent years, I support the passing of the Bill to regain certain measures of protection for Queensland's precious native ecosystems and our native species which rely on them. I support the Bill as proposed for its efforts to:

- Reinstatement of the protection of high value regrowth on freehold lands. If this provision is to be extended to Indigenous-held lands then it should also be extended to all term leased lands given the State retains significant caveats on both of these forms of tenure.
- Remove provisions which permit clearing applications for high value agriculture and irrigated agriculture.
- Broaden protection of riparian vegetation, especially in Great Barrier Reef (GBR) catchments, although for comparatively intact bioregions such as Cape York Peninsula, provisions to protect riparian vegetation should apply across the entire bioregion given the acknowledged high ecological riparian values there (ref: Cape York scientists submission to this Committee's present inquiry) not necessarily limited to the GBR lagoon but also to Gulf of Carpentaria catchments in particular given the presently limited scientific knowledge of the Gulf's unique reefs and marine ecosystems.
- Reinstatement of the application of the riverine protection permit framework to the destruction of vegetation in a watercourse, lake or spring.
- Reinstatement of a broader requirement for environmental offsets to be required for any residual impact, not just 'significant' impacts as is currently provided for in offsets legislation (the flawed statutory approach to offsetting in place presently being acknowledged).

I attach for the Committee's reference several photographic images which I have taken myself at various times to document the extent of clearing in selected areas over recent years. These highlight the physical extent of clearing and the geographic and landscape context within which the related clearing has taken place. All large scale clearing will impact surrounding tenures, protected or not.

Yours sincerely



Ellie Bock

Photographic images of selected vegetation clearing in various locations within the greater Cape York Peninsula bioregion taken by the submitter during 2014, 2015 and 2016.



Image 1: Vegetation clearance for large-scale mining, Weipa area CYP, December 2014

Image 2: Vegetation clearance for forestry surrounded by Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, April 2016





Image 3: Broad-scale vegetation clearance in the vicinity of Laura, CYP – image taken 22 May 2015

Image 4: Broad-scale vegetation clearance in the vicinity of Laura, CYP – image taken 13 April 2016



Image 5: Vegetation clearing, upper Daintree catchment at WTWHA margin – image taken 13/04/ 2016

