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Research Director
Agriculture and Environment Committee
Parliament House
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Chair and Committee Members

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

I am writing to give my full support to the *Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016*. Amending the changes made to the Act by the LNP in 2013 is extremely important for a number of reasons and I will outline these below.

The amount of land cleared in Queensland has gone from 80 000 hectares in 2009 to more than 300 000 ha in 2015. This degree of land clearing is completely unsustainable and is causing long term degradation to Queensland's environment. The passing of the *Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016* will provide sensible controls over the most damaging types of clearing by: removing the ability to get a permit to broad scale clear for High Value Agriculture; restoring protections for ecologically important High Value Regrowth on freehold and Aboriginal land; restoring protections for riparian vegetation and extending provisions to all Great Barrier Reef catchments; removing the defence of claimed mistaken clearing and restoring the starting presumption that a landholder is responsible for clearing that takes place on their property. These changes represent sensible steps to help bring about a more sustainable agricultural sector in Queensland.

I grew up on a dairy farm in a heavily cleared region of the Fassifern Valley in SEQ. It was my early experiences seeing first-hand the damage, most notably soil erosion, salinity and the loss of biodiversity, that broad scale clearing has on the landscape that has me concerned about the way broad scale land clearing is still being practiced in rural QLD.

As an adult I have worked and travelled extensively throughout southern and central Queensland. Through my travels I have witnessed first-hand the widespread land degradation caused by broad scale clearing. The amount and degree of land degradation caused by land clearing has deeply shocked and saddened me.

In this submission I will give two brief examples and provide maps and photos as evidence to show how proposed changes will result in more sensible land management practices.

Example 1:

The Scenic Rim region of SEQ was largely covered by brigalow dominated vine forests at the time of colonisation. These forests were heavily cleared in the late 19th and early 20th century to give landholders access to the fertile soils that these forests grow on. The Scenic Rim region was cleared to the extent that only a small fraction of the original vine forest is now left and the majority of the regional ecosystems that once dominated the area are now classified as endangered. Since the early clearing however small areas of vine forest have regrown and now form important refuges for the rich biodiversity that once dominated the area.

Under the amendments made to the VMA in 2009 much of this regrowth was classified as high value due to the endangered status of the regional ecosystems and was subsequently protected from broad scale land clearing. Because the land in this part of Queensland is freehold this protection was lost when the LNP amended the VMA in 2012. If the *Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016* is passed it will help to protect these patches of endangered regrowth by regulating high-value regrowth on freehold land. The protection afforded to these patches can be seen in the mapping layers on QLD Globe (Fig. 1 & 2). Regulating the clearing of these endangered regrowth patches is an extremely important step in securing the long term biodiversity of the regions unique species.

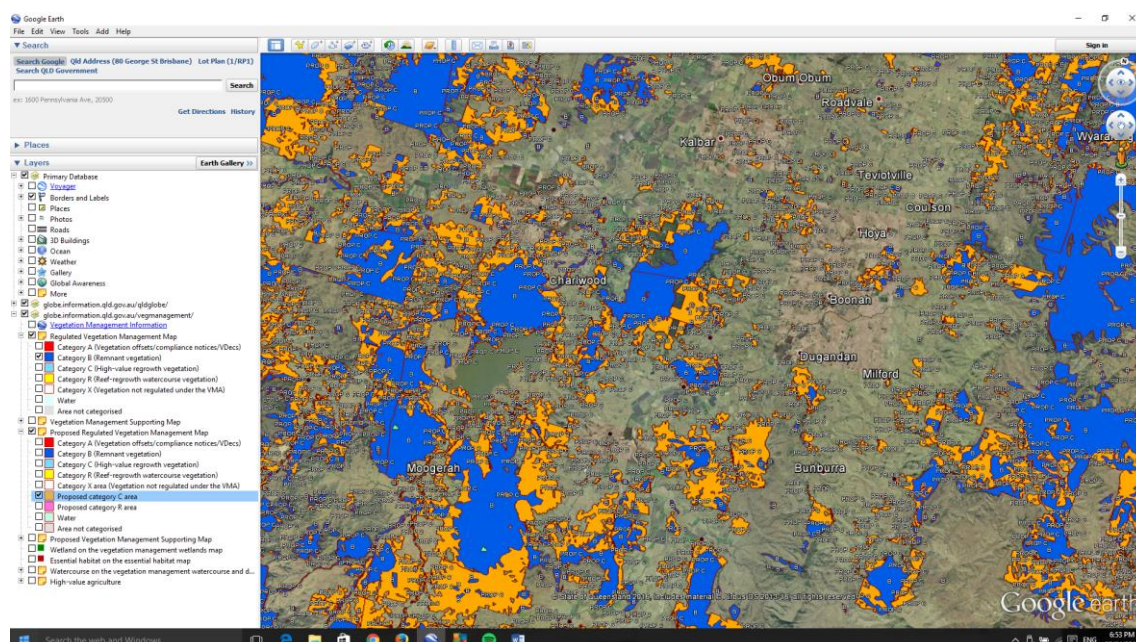


Fig. 1 & 2. The Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 will help to protect what little remains of endangered brigalow dominated vine forest. Blue represents the currently regulated remnant vegetation, orange represents the high value regrowth which is not regulated now but will be protected if the *Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016* is passed.

Example 2:

On a recent work trip from Roma to Emerald I witnessed the work of a dozer clearing what was classed as 'high value regrowth' under the *Act* before the LNP amended the *Act* in 2013 (Fig 3 & 4). If the *Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016* is passed areas like this would be protected from this type of clearing because it would once again be illegal to clear high value regrowth. In this case the proposed amendments to the *Act* would restore protections for trees in riparian areas and extend provisions to all Great Barrier Reef catchments. The damage this clearing is causing at a paddock scale - erosion and loss of biodiversity - can clearly be seen. Little economic gains result from this type of clearing - the landholder has clearly lost a large amount of valuable soil which in a reef catchment (Fitzroy) will end up polluting the Great Barrier Reef and causing further environmental damage.





Fig. 3 & 4. Dozer clearing high value regrowth in a Reef catchment and soil erosion exacerbated by further clearing in a waterway (photos taken November 2014).

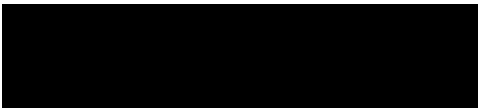
These two examples represent only a small part of the overall improvements that amending the *Act* will make to the health of Queensland's natural environment and agricultural lands. Amending the *Act* will help to restore some balance between unsustainable farming practices and protecting what remains of Queensland's forests and woodlands.

It is important to remember that in the year with the least amount of clearing (2009) 80 000 hectares was still cleared in Queensland - an area larger than all the other States clearing combined. With this figure in mind it is clear that enough loopholes still exist that make some types of clearing possible. Because of this, I believe the current amendments to the *Act* do not go far enough to properly protect Queensland's forests and woodlands but I believe it will certainly help to control the most destructive and unsustainable forms of land clearing.

Lastly, after the record breaking heat of the last few months (and years) It is also extremely important that we reduce Queensland's carbon emissions in as many ways as possible. Controlling broad scale land clearing is one very important and effective way to reduce the millions of tons of carbon being released each year into the atmosphere.

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

Yours sincerely

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Micah Chataway