

Agricultural and Environment Committee
Parliament House
Brisbane QLD 4000

To whom it may concern,

I support the reforms to the *Vegetation Management Act 1999* contained in the *Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016*, and recommend its passing. Coming from Canada to complete an environmental management degree at the University of Queensland, I was shocked and disgusted to learn about the extent of clearing that occurs in Queensland. The existing VMA contradicts the goals of international climate agreements, as well as the Commonwealth's climate commitments and policies – at a minimum; this comes at a cost to Australian taxpayers as the Direct Action Plan struggles to compensate for Queensland's tree clearing alone. As such, I support the changes to:

➤ **Remove the high value agriculture provisions.**

From WWF's analysis, clearing of approved high value agriculture permits (112,000 ha), will result in emissions of at least 11.7 Mt CO₂-e. According to recent analysis from CO₂ Australia, at a minimum this figure is double the carbon emissions avoided by the entirety of the Commonwealth's 20 Million Trees Program, which comes at a cost of \$50 billion to Australian taxpayers and could realise 2-6 Mt CO₂-e emissions reductions. At current auction prices (average \$13.12/t CO₂-e), offsetting the high value agriculture emissions would come at a \$7.8M under the Emissions Reductions Fund. Based on ABS statistics on the value of agricultural commodities produced in Queensland, there is no correlation between broad-scale clearing and agricultural production in recent years. Coupled with a questionable at best approvals process (e.g. Olive Vale) and legislative loop holes that do not enforce the actual production of the crop applied for, our remaining remnant woodlands should not be cleared for so called "high value" agriculture.

➤ **Restore controls on high value regrowth.**

In the context of Queensland's highly modified agricultural landscape, regrowth vegetation has the opportunity to play an important role in carbon sequestration and restoration of biodiversity values. For example, in endangered brigalow woodlands, research indicates that natural regeneration of brigalow contributes valuable habitat to endangered woodland bird species – in cases where regrowth reaches 30 years of age, this habitat is even able to support slightly higher densities of woodland birds than in remnant ecosystems (see Bowen et al. 2009).

➤ **Reinstate the onus of proof provision.**

Land holders must be accountable for activities that take place on their property, with land clearing being no exception. Illegal clearing must, as a starting presumption, be linked to the land holder. All land assets, including inner city properties, are held responsible for upholding environmental policies (e.g. penalties enforced for excessive water consumption during drought) and complying with building codes and zoning requirements. There is no reason why land clearing should be exempt from this.

While I support the Amendment Bill and recommend its passing, I strongly believe further reforms to Queensland's vegetation management framework are necessary to alleviate pressures on our unique biodiversity and protect our climate.

Sincerely,

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