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

Dear Chair and Committee Members,

I support the reinstatement of the Vegetation Management Act as it was prior to the modifications made by the Newman Government.

There is clear evidence that the current VMA does not protect important vegetation throughout QLD.

- Land clearing in QLD tripled since 2010¹
- Land clearing is higher in QLD than any other Australian state²
- 45% of QLD's ecosystems are threatened because of land clearing³
- Currently illegal clearing is not being regulated, prevented or disincentivised⁴.

QLD's land clearing has serious implications for global climate change.

- Gains made by the Emissions Reduction Fund are negated by QLD's land clearing rates
- The land clearing therefore results in the doubled pressures on biodiversity, with less available habitat, fragmented habitat, increasingly unsuitable regional climates, and fewer opportunities to move to habitat within a more suitable climate.

Increased rates of landclearing in Queensland have serious implications for the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, which is threatened by increased runoff from the land clearing, increasing temperatures⁵ and increasing ocean acidification. We are currently in the middle of the worst coral reef bleaching event ever recorded for the Great Barrier Reef⁶, so clearly urgent action is required. Runoff, which is substantially increased by agriculture and unsustainable management of riparian areas – including the lack of protection of riparian areas from clearing, is the main cause of crown-of-

¹ <http://www.queenslandcountrylife.com.au/story/3367134/drought-drives-mulga-hunger/>

² <http://theconversation.com/land-clearing-in-queensland-triples-after-policy-ping-pong-38279>

³ <http://www.wwf.org.au/?11441/Changing-land-use-to-save-Australian-wildlife>

⁴ <http://statements.qld.gov.au/Statement/2012/4/19/minister-orders-review-of-vegetation-clearing-enforcement-processes>

⁵ <https://theconversation.com/great-barrier-reef-bleaching-would-be-almost-impossible-without-climate-change-58408>

⁶ <https://theconversation.com/great-barrier-reef-bleaching-stats-are-bad-enough-without-media-misreporting-58283>

thorns starfish outbreaks. These outbreaks, along with cyclones, are major threats to long term persistence of the Great Barrier Reef. Therefore increasing reef resilience requires reducing the runoff. Ending land clearing in Queensland is crucial for reducing the likelihood of severe climate change, and increasing the general resilience of the reef.

The east coast of northern Australia will provide crucial habitat for species seeking refuge from climate change⁷, therefore continuous tracts of vegetation are required for species to disperse to these new areas. These areas should not be exposed to risk of broadscale clearing.

Northern Queensland has seen a high rate of species discovery⁸, it is highly likely that there are many more species that are yet to be discovered. The current VMA puts these highly biodiverse and highly understudied habitats at high risk of broad scale destruction.

Queensland has high potential for carbon sequestration, that, under an appropriate carbon pricing scheme, will be profitable for land holders⁹. Carbon farming is often highly compatible with other productive industries, and has the added value of increasing the biodiversity value and land condition of the property.

Queensland has threatened species whose persistence depends on the appropriate management of private land, including Black-throated finch (*Poephila cincta cincta*), Allan's Ierista (*Lerista allanae*), Coxen's fig-parrot (*Cyclopsitta diophthalma coxeni*) and Golden-shouldered parrot (*Psephotus chrysopterygius*). The current VMA does not provide adequate protection of the habitat of these species on private land.

I urge your Department to everything in your power to protect vegetation. This will include regulating vegetation management, prosecuting illegal clearing, and incentives for protecting high value vegetation on private land.

Yours sincerely,

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⁷ <http://www.nccarf.edu.au/publications/climate-change-refugia-terrestrial-biodiversity>

⁸ Hoskin CJ 2012. Zootaxa 3271:1-16.

Hoskin CJ 2013a. Zootaxa 3722:061-072.

Hoskin CJ 2013b. Zootaxa 3722:385-395.

Hoskin CJ 2014. Zootaxa 3869:224-236.

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Hoskin CJ, Couper PJ 2012. Zootaxa 3546:1-28.

Vanderduys EP, Hines H, *et al* 2011. Australian Zoologist 35:622-626.

⁹ Evans MC, Carwardine J, *et al* 2015. Environmental Science & Policy 50:114-129