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**To** the Research Director and Members of the Agriculture and Environment Parliamentary Committee  
Parliament House  
Brisbane, QLD 4000  
at [vminquiry@parliament.qld.gov.au](mailto:vminquiry@parliament.qld.gov.au)

**Re** The Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2016

Dear Chair and Committee Members

Permit me to share a memory with you. Not long before he died, my father spent a couple of years in a nursing home. I used to take him out for a drive through the beautiful country nearby: there were rolling downlands and lush vegetation. It was always the trees that captured his attention. 'Look at the trees,' he would say, in awe and appreciation. My life was hectic at the time: I had three children to raise on my own and a full-time job. He ensured I wasn't totally distracted from my natural surroundings by life's minutiae or its big issues.

My father was right: the trees were magnificent. Trees usually are, in most contexts, and particularly within the human psyche, where they feature massively, both literally and figuratively. Trees, especially large old trees, affect hydrological cycles, nutrient cycles, naturally occurring disturbance regimes, and the distribution of plant and animal species.

I am an advocate for the environment who devotes a considerable proportion of her time in support of conservation and environmental protectors. I write to you from the perspective of one who pales at the sound of yet another wood chipper clearing greenery in Brisbane's suburbs for the construction of tight-fitting block of units. I have travelled extensively throughout Queensland, and believe that there are extraordinary landscapes to behold.

There is also, however, masses of evidence of a land ravaged by settlers who were profligate with the vast natural resources at their disposal.

Now, as then, the widespread clearing of trees destroys habitat and therefore wildlife, and, ultimately, a region's biodiversity. With greater weather extremes resulting from further climate change over the next few years, tree-covered 'refugia' will become increasingly significant to ensure wildlife survival. The continued planet-wide loss of woodland and forest is likely to trigger more serious climate change than already threatens. Those who cut down trees bear a huge responsibility for their actions.

The clearing of vegetation increases the salinity of soils, soil erosion and other land degradation, run-off and flooding, and the release of carbon into the atmosphere. Run-off eventually reaches the mouths of creeks and rivers. The Great Barrier Reef is under substantial pressure already, with the greater warmth and acidity of the ocean precipitating the worst bleaching event ever recorded. We cannot condone greater run-off containing agricultural pollutants to add further to the Reef's woes.

Trees provide homes for animals, shelter for stock, and wild places in which we humans seek refuge and solace. Queensland needs more trees, not fewer; more extensive areas of high-conservation value that are truly protected from any form of development, with no exceptions made for the most lucrative.

A dreadful history of unremitting land clearance in Queensland was gradually rectified by pieces of vegetation management legislation during the last decade and a half. Unfortunately, progress was undermined recently by Campbell Newman's government, which saw fit to 'relax' some of the laws restricting land clearing. Reduced areas of koala habitat – and the koala is Vulnerable to extinction – were a particularly noticeable consequence of Mr Newman's mistaken priorities. Those who sanction the cutting down of trees bear a huge responsibility for their decisions.

It is all the more imperative, therefore, that the current Bill passes, restoring good vegetation management practices.

I believe Queenslanders want their remarkable landscape protected from the wanton land-clearing free-for-all that was encouraged half a century ago, and subsequently revived under Newman, with destructive methods of tree removal. They were horrified, as was I, by the dozer-and-chain footage of the clearing of Olive Vale in Far North Queensland last year. This was supposedly done for the purposes of high-value agriculture, but it remains to be seen if this is even possible in the region's soils, with no trees to help retain moisture. Much more likely is that the land will be used for grazing. Following trips into the Outback and increasingly arid regions of this state, I have to conclude that large enough areas of vegetation in Queensland – and indeed Australia as a whole – have already been consumed by roaming stock.

This Bill seeks to curb the hitherto unacceptable level of land clearing by protecting areas of high-value regrowth and restricting the number of permits for high-value agriculture and irrigated agriculture. It reinstates the onus of proof that applies under any law: farmers and landowners are obliged to be fully cognizant of regulations regarding the clearing of land. This Bill will not threaten farmers' livelihoods: it will result neither in higher food prices nor fewer jobs in the agricultural sector. Farmers will not be prevented from removing a tree as part of routine or essential maintenance of their property.

A vociferous minority demanding their right to clear land regardless of the environmental impacts of their actions cannot be allowed to derail the passage of this Bill. There are wider implications of the actions of all of us that can no longer be considered in splendid isolation but must be placed in a wider and more responsible planetary context.

I thank you for reading this submission.

Jude Garlick