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Dear Chair and Committee Members

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

I am sending you this submission as a private citizen living in Brisbane who cares about our environment. I am horrified at the scale of vegetation clearing that has taken place in Queensland since the Newman government changed the law and enabled such destruction to take place legally.

I previously lived in Western Australia and, in my work with the Environmental Protection Authority, provided assessment advice to the Government regarding the environmental impact of proposals, including the removal of vegetation for various purposes. Clearing of vegetation in WA was regarded as extremely detrimental to the environment, given the extensive clearing that had already been done in Australia since settlement. The Labor government was in power during that time and the rate of vegetation loss declined rapidly thanks to the rigorous way clearing was controlled by government. I understand that the Barnett government has since reversed some of those legislative controls and vegetation clearing has increased, somewhat similar to what has occurred in Queensland.

It is vitally important that the remaining Queensland vegetation is given the highest protection possible because it underpins all the biodiversity contained within ecosystems. The revered koala is under extreme pressure for survival because of the loss of its habitat, but all native animals rely on vegetation for their existence. Australia has a disgraceful reputation for species extinction which is the direct result of vegetation removal.

Clearing for so-called High Value Agriculture has permitted vast areas to be totally destroyed and those trees can never grow again. I support the Bill as it removes the ability for landowner to get a permit to clear for this reason.

Areas that were previously cleared and are now regrowing are extremely important from an ecological perspective and I support the Bill for the proposal to restore protections for those on freehold and Aboriginal land.
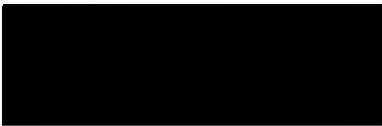
Vegetation acts to retain water and sediment and prevents runoff to water courses. It is therefore extremely important in protecting the Great Barrier Reef from sediment that can negatively impact on corals. It is extremely important the reef catchments be given protection and I support the proposed Bill because it restores protections for the riparian zones and will extend those provisions to all the Great Barrier Reef catchments.

The current devastating bleaching of the corals on the Great Barrier Reef is the direct result of climate change and the release of millions of tons of CO^2 from not only the burning of fossil fuels, but also from the release from land clearing. When land is cleared of native vegetation for farmland, the wood is usually burned with a direct impact on CO^2 emissions, however, there is also loss from the biomass under the ground as well over time. The amount of CO^2 emitted varies widely because of different climatic and soil conditions and *in 2009, land clearing accounted for around 7% of Australia's net emissions of 564.5 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent reported under the Kyoto Protocol (Australian National Greenhousing Accounts – Drivers of land clearing in Australia Fact Sheet).* I support the Bill because it restores the presumption that a landholder is responsible for clearing that takes place on their property and prevents them adding to the greenhouse emissions.

I further support the Bill because of its retrospectivity to attempt to deter panic clearing by land holders. There is no such thing as a right to clear land but landowners may undertake clearing because they fear this could be their last chance before the Bill becomes law.

In summary, the provisions of the Bill are totally supported.

Yours sincerely

Marie Ward