



**Magnetic  
Island  
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Agriculture and Environment Committee  
Queensland Parliament  
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**Submission to the Inquiry into the Vegetation Management  
(Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016.**

Magnetic Island Nature Care Association (MINCA) is an incorporated voluntary conservation group established with the objects of supporting and encouraging the protection and sustainable use of Magnetic Island, its adjacent waters and the associated region.

MINCA opposed the changes by the Newman government to the VMA and commends the State Government for the proposed amendments. Like others in the conservation movement we acknowledge that the previous VMA and associated acts, regulations and policies were the result of many years of consultation and development and were effective tools for the protection and management of Queensland vegetation, landscape and biodiversity values.

MINCA strongly supports the proposed amendments, and in particular the transitional arrangements to ensure that inappropriate clearing does not undermine the intent of the amendments while they are being further considered.

The controls the proposed legislation will re-instate are essential for the future wellbeing of the Queensland environment and its economy, and of its people. They will ensure that once again we become responsible citizens of Australia, and of the global community.

Global environmental change must be addressed urgently, at all scales and in all ways possible. The legislative changes proposed are a sound basis for the protection of the ecological elements and processes that underpin regional environments, and ultimately underpin global environmental health. This includes the protection of ecological communities, and of the processes that protect and maintain water cycles, soil stability, nutrient cycling and associated biological diversity. The amendments will help ensure that regional land uses can be sustainable, and that Queensland is part of global responses to reduce the degree and impact of climate change. The amendments will ensure a reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, an increase in carbon sequestration, a reduction in the increasing

stresses being placed on the natural environment through overdevelopment and use, and the amelioration of local climates through the retention of adequate shade and soil cover.

In particular MINCA supports the amendments to the Vegetation Management Act 1999 to:

**Remove the clearing of high value agricultural and high value irrigated land as a relevant purpose for making a development application, and the inclusion of freehold and indigenous land in assessments of regrowth.**

Many parts of Queensland have been overdeveloped and the protection of significant regrowth is the most effective way to reduce further degradation and minimize downstream impacts. The most productive land has already been largely cleared and viable remnants will only be retained if further clearing is prevented and significant regrowth carefully nurtured. Most Not of Concern ecosystems have not been developed due to their low capability and should not be available for broadscale clearing. Such clearing will inevitably lead to long term land degradation.

**Reinstate the responsibility to the landholder for unauthorized clearing.**

The arguments in the explanatory notes to the bill are fully supported.

**Establish transitional provisions in Division 12 to discourage "panic" clearing, and of "panic" applications to declare Category X areas through the PMAV process.**

Any further clearing in Queensland from now should be minimal and only after careful consideration. The proposed amendments will assist this by discouraging unauthorised clearing.

**Amendment of the Dictionary to include the additional GBR catchments Burnett-Mary, Eastern Cape York and the Fitzroy in the protection of regrowth vegetation.**

These catchments all have the potential to impact on the GBR and require particular care and attention.

MINCA also supports the consequential amendments to the Sustainable Planning Act, the Water Act and the Environmental Offsets Act. In particular we strongly support the requirement for the restoration of areas cleared without proper approval within the transitional period, and the increased protection given to watercourses, lakes and springs. The criteria proposed for the assessment of these areas through Section 220 of the Water Act are fully supported.

MINCA would also support further amendments to the VMA to address the following issues:

**Broadscale clearing of Mulga (*Acacia aneura*) for fodder is and should be treated as broadscale clearing.**

Mulga is cleared for fodder when the natural pastures have been grazed out and the ground has been bared. In other words when degradation is severe. To further compound this degradation by largely unregulated broadscale clearing is both irresponsible and illogical and is a devastating short term response to a long term problem. With climate change and increasing heat and moisture stress, tree cover will become increasingly significant in soil and landscape protection.

Destocking and property build up to enable long term restoration is the only sustainable response to the history of overgrazing in the Mulga Lands and should be supported by the state government. "Fodder" clearing should be stopped.

**The use of the "endangered" and "of concern" categories as a principal criteria in deciding applications enables the piecemeal disturbance or development of essentially undeveloped landscapes. A landscape scale response is needed to ensure the outstanding natural values of these areas.**

Undeveloped landscapes dominate the northern bioregions, including Cape York, the Einasleigh Uplands, the Gulf Plains, the North West Highlands and the Desert Uplands. Undisturbed savanna landscapes such as these are now of world significance and Australia has the largest remaining areas. Their protection should be a state and national priority. In Queensland they are under threat as the push to develop the north develops in response to increasing droughts in southern Australia and increasing markets for food to our north. The legislation should ensure that land use remains at a sustainable level, and natural values are not lost through incremental development. This could be achieved by the decisive use of Declared Areas under the VMA, bolstered by amendments that prohibit incremental change in intact landscapes.

**Grassland regional ecosystems should be regulated**


Of all the savanna landscapes, grasslands are the most threatened: they are cleared by the plough. In the Brigalow Belt the unregulated development of grasslands has inevitably led to their destruction to the extent that they are now Endangered, and the Federal Government has had to intervene in their protection. The Queensland Government should accept its responsibility for the sustainable use of these ecosystems and the VMA is the most suitable existing legislation to achieve this.

This submission has the full support of the Executive Committee of MINCA. It has been made on the basis of materials accessed via the committee's website, and on the basis of my personal involvement in the development of the previous clearing controls between 1992 and 2011, the development and implementation of the regional ecosystem and mapping framework that underpins the VMA (between 1989 and 2011), and in the assessment and planning for sustainable land use and biodiversity conservation across Queensland, and particularly in the north, between 1975 and 2011.

Thank you for the opportunity for making this submission. MINCA commends the State Government for finally acting to redress the environmental irresponsibility of the previous government.

Should you require further information on particular aspects of this submission please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

  
Gethin Morgan  
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Magnetic Island Nature Care.  
