Submission No. 608

WILDLIFE PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF QUEENSLAND
FNQ/Cairns Branch

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Research Director
Agriculture and Environment Committee
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Re: The Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill.

Members of the FNQ/Cairns Branch of Wildlife Queensland have examined the proposed changes to the Vegetation Management Act (VMA) and fully support them. As the northernmost branch of the state wide conservation group Wildlife Queensland, our membership has a particular interest in the Wet Tropics, Cape York Peninsula and the Great Barrier Reef.

We were appalled at the previous governments' changes to the VMA and the consequent land clearing which included an area of high value regrowth rainforest on the Evelyn Tableland, part of the limited area of high altitude forest and habitat for threatened species such as the Southern Cassowary. In addition to the direct loss of animals (from injury during clearing, displacement into occupied habitat and hazards such as roads, dogs and fences), habitat fragmentation and loss of corridors such as riparian strips also have major impacts on the diversity of species surviving in an area.

The broadscale clearing and loss of riparian vegetation must be contributing to further sedimentation of the rivers with outflow onto the Great Barrier Reef; already under severe stress due to high water temperatures and acidification. It is essential that vegetation along waterways and around swamps and waterbodies be adequately protected.

The majority of soils in Cape York Peninsula are ancient, consequently depauperate and readily eroded making clearing and agriculture unlikely to be successful and in all probability an environmental disaster particularly for the adjacent GBR.

Land clearing, by releasing large volumes of carbon dioxide, contributes significantly to global warming which will have major impacts not only on the reef and natural areas, but also on our economy and lifestyles.

Loss of tree cover has been shown to reduce rainfall and this has been recorded on the Atherton Tableland since settlement.

Members of this branch of Wildlife Queensland have been actively involved in vegetation restoration projects with the branch, with other groups and in individual projects. As a result we know just how much hard work and time it takes to regrow a semblance of the original forest while recognising that it will be many years before if is truly restored. A recent paper by Goosems et al (2016) demonstrated that "*even the oldest secondary forests (60yr)did not converge with the species composition and diversity of mature forests."*

Consequently we are greatly concerned at the loss of any forest, whether intact or old regrowth.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on this proposed legislation.

Yours sincerely

Ann Sutherland

(Secretary)

Goosems M, Paz C. Fensham R, Preece N, Goosem S, Laurance SGW. Forest Age and isolation affect the rate of recovery of plant species diversity ad community composition in secondary rainforests in tropical Australia. *Journal of Vegetation Science* **27** (2016) 504-514