

SUBMISSION
TO THE AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE
INQUIRY INTO THE
Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016
BY DAVID WHITE

1. Land clearing in Queensland is threatening Australia's chances of meeting the climate change targets it pledged in Paris last year and formally signed on to this month.
2. Up until 2013 land clearing rates in Australia were declining and that was the primary reason Australia had been able to meet climate change goals. In 2013-14, 300,000 hectares were cleared just in Queensland, double the rate in 2011-12. Between 2012 and 2015 land clearing emissions in Australia rose 11 times faster than any other sector.
3. This turnaround in rates of clearing threatens to wipe out emission reductions bought by the Federal Government's Direct Action scheme and jeopardises Australia's chances of meeting its commitment to reduce greenhouse emissions by 26-28% by 2030.
4. Part of the surge in emissions from land use and tree clearing was acknowledged in the Federal Government's latest report on Australia's greenhouse emissions, released in December 2015, which predicted that emissions from land clearing would rise 24% from 2013 levels, from an average 37 million tonnes to an average 46 million tonnes a year up to 2020, and 44 million tonnes a year between 2020 and 2030.
5. It's probable that some of the land clearing undertaken recently could have an impact on one or more of the "matters of national environmental significance" the Federal EPBC Act is designed to protect. These include nationally-listed threatened species, migratory species, and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. This is why the Federal Environment Department has become concerned that recent land clearing may have contravened the provisions of the EPBC Act.

6. While excessive and widespread land clearing of remnant woodlands may endanger threatened and/or iconic fauna and flora species, there is also the high risk that many hundreds of other flora and insect species that are ecologically important may also be eliminated due to clearing.
7. Every year, new flora and insect species are discovered by researchers across rural Queensland. It is clear that without tight restrictions on where and how land can be cleared, many of these as yet undiscovered species – which may lead to medical and biological advances - are in danger of being removed from our planet forever. The proposed changes in the Bill to remove the ability to permit the clearing for “High Value agriculture” must be welcomed by all who want to cherish and preserve our natural heritage.
8. The provisions in the Bill that restore protections for riparian areas are supported and long overdue. Many citizens are unaware of the long-term damage to the wider environment of removal of vegetation along creek and river banks.
9. All catchments that flow into the Great Barrier Reef should be tightly protected because of the impacts of toxic runoff on the fragile marine environment.
10. I support the measure in the Bill that makes it clear that a landholder is fully responsible for clearing that takes place on their property.
11. I support the retroactive proposal that is aimed at deterring any clearing that is done outside the normal course of business, before the Bill is properly considered by the Parliament.
12. Threats to weaken land clearing laws in several other states mean that it is all the more important that limits on widespread land clearing in this State must be implemented in the national interest, as proposed by this Bill.

SUBMITTED BY:

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