

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



**THE
WILDERNESS
SOCIETY**

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Attachments:

Letter from Conservation Groups about land clearing law reform issues

Opinion piece of land clearing law reform published in the Queensland Country Life

1. Executive Summary and Recommendations

Queensland has some of the most ecologically sensitive and important landscapes, rivers, and marine areas on the planet, and responsibility for the ongoing protection of these areas lies with the governments of the day. Present Queenslanders and history will both be judges of how well certain governments have acted to ensure our environment remains in the best shape possible... for nature and for economic prosperity given the environment is our best long term economic competitive advantage.

Land clearing – the clearing of tress, bushland and other native vegetation - is the biggest threat to biodiversity and native wildlife in Queensland. Effective regulation of, and restraints on land clearing are vital to prevent further ecosystem endangerment and mass extinction of Australian wildlife. Land clearing is also a major source of carbon pollution, and substantial emissions reductions can be and have been achieved in Queensland through controls on land clearing. Land clearing can further impact on land degradation, hydrology, soil erosion and farmland productivity. The future of the Great Barrier Reef is also in part tied to how Queensland deals with its land clearing.

Between the late 1990s and 2012, Queensland moved to ensure that broadscale land-clearing of remnant and regrowing native vegetation was no longer permitted in this state, in recognition that such clearing has devastating effects for biodiversity, for landscape intactness, for river catchments, and for the climate. Without very rigorous regulation and enforcement, numerous instances of smaller scale clearing of remnant and regrowing native vegetation can also have the same impacts.

Queensland was once the land clearing capital of Australia, and regrettably land clearing rates in this state are once again rising dramatically. The rise started before the LNP's 2013 amendments to the *Vegetation Management Act 1999* (VMA), highlighting the underlying issues and enforcement of the legislation, and with its scope. However, the subsequent rapid acceleration in clearing has very obviously occurred as a result of both legislative and policy changes introduced by the previous LNP government, including newly allowed clearing, weakened enforcement and the strong likelihood of an increase in illegal clearing.

Stronger land clearing laws are urgently needed to protect wildlife and biodiversity, to keep landscapes intact and avoid erosion, to reduce carbon emissions and impacts of climate change and negative weather patterns, to avoid damage to the Great Barrier Reef, to safeguard our broad economic and social welfare, and to maintain our national and international reputation.

The vitriol that has already been expressed in relation to the *Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016* has been extraordinary, and unnecessary. This Bill represents a cautious and sensible approach to regulating the clearing of native woodlands in Queensland. Despite the claims of doomsayers and property rights ideologues, it will not stop all clearing, nor will it negatively impact on overall agricultural productivity. The Bill essentially restores controls on broadscale clearing which were introduced in the mid-2000s (supported by both Labor and the Liberal Party, and by Peter Wellington MP) and extended in 2010 to include a limited amount of ecologically significant regrowing woodlands uncleared since 1989.

Both of these changes were clearing flagged in advance during respective election campaigns and in policy discussions with all stakeholders, and at one stage with substantial compensation measures. Indications at the time from AgForce were that these were accepted, workable and not obviously impacting on overall agricultural output.

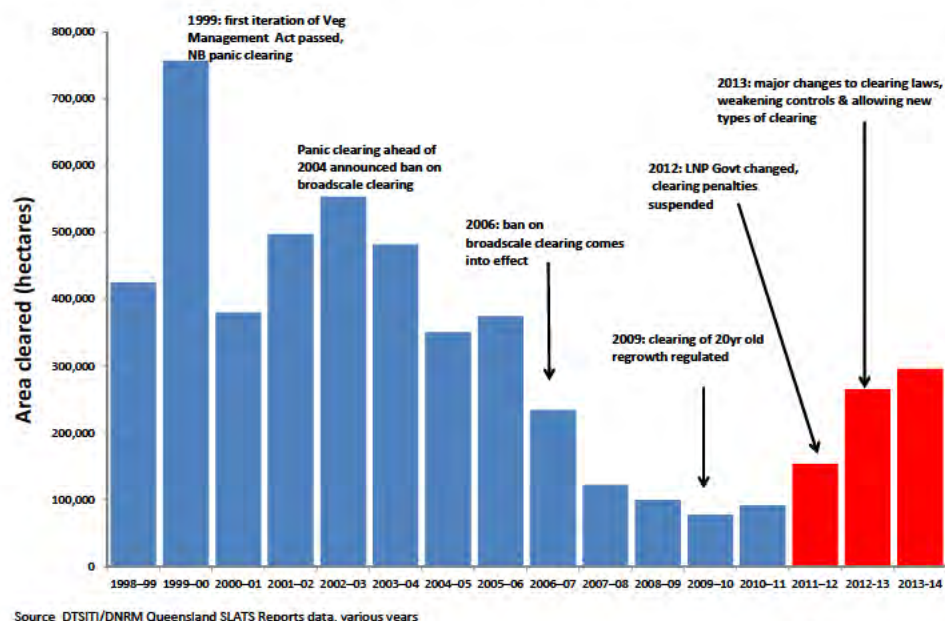
Unlike the LNP's changes to the *Vegetation Management Act* and its regulatory frameworks in 2012 and 2013, which were not announced during the 2012 election (and which in fact were explicitly ruled out by Campbell Newman during that election), the intended legislation currently before Parliament, and now being examined by the Agricultural and Environment Committee, fulfils a clear and transparent commitment from Labor during the 2015 Queensland election.

Queenslanders, be they environmentalists, farmers, rural landholders, or urban communities, all want to see their natural environments protected, and their state left in the best shape for future generations. We all care about nature, but if we are to be serious about that, we must also recognise the importance of environmental laws and regulations, and the need for these laws and regulations to be strong. As a community, we also need to accept government's duty of care for the environment, and its responsibility to ensure our environment is properly protected. And governments in kind must fulfil that duty of care.

While the provisions of the Bill are necessarily a core focus for the Committee, and the devastating impacts that land clearing has on native animals and the broader environment need to be properly considered, there are perhaps three contextual factors which members of the Committee should also note and appreciate: scale of clearing, connection with climate change, and impacts on farm output.

It is imperative that the Committee acknowledge and understand the actual levels of and trends in land clearing rates in Queensland over the past decade and a half; Queensland's greenhouse gas emissions from land clearing over the same time; and how agricultural productivity has fared during this period. Each can be summarised in the following graphs, which are included and analysed in greater detail in the main body of this submission:

Clearing is rapidly rising again. Note rates and trends in land clearing in Queensland, red years associated with LNP changes. Key reforms and changes noted



Queensland tree clearing and emissions 2004-2014

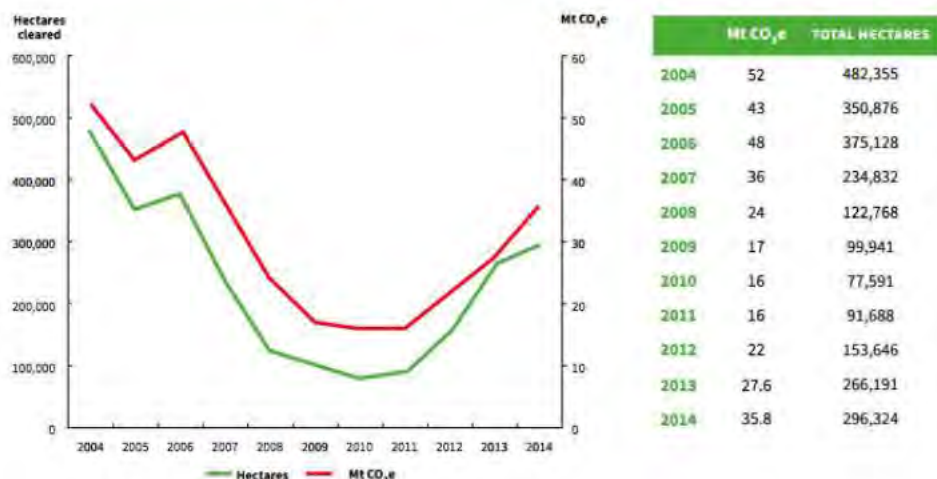
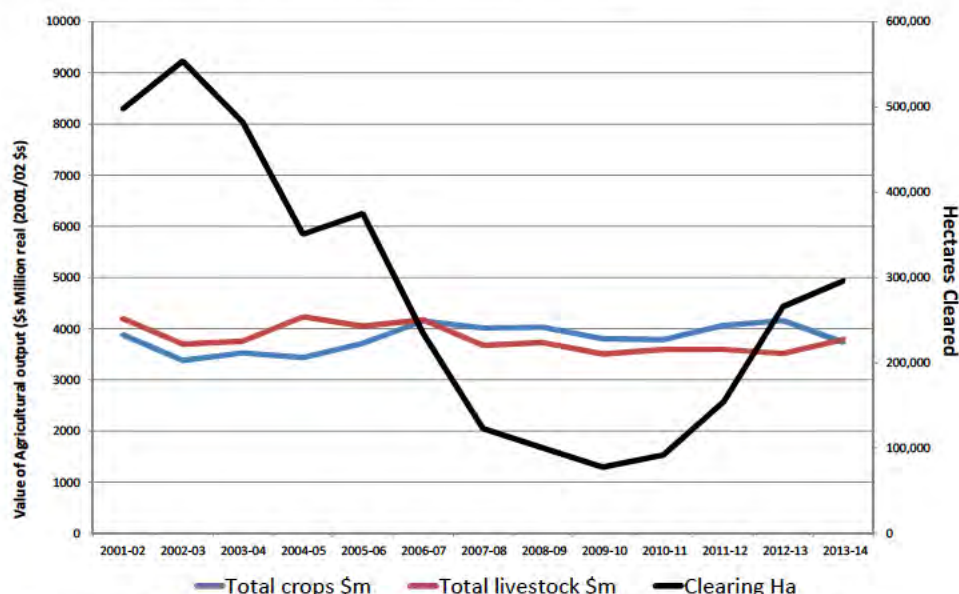


FIGURE 2. Tree clearing and emissions in Queensland from 2004-2014.⁶ In the absence of Australian Government tree clearing data from 2013 onwards and with questions around the Australian Government's data overall (see Box 1), this figure is the most illustrative of the upsurge in tree clearing and emissions, with table data also supplied. This is particularly pertinent as Queensland is consistently the single largest contributor of national tree clearing rates and emissions. NOTE: 2014 denotes fiscal year 2013-14, and so on.

Clearing and tree-related carbon releases go hand-in-hand, so emissions are now rising rapidly. Note greenhouse emissions resulting from land clearing in Queensland, green line is clearing, red line emissions

Clearing does not lead to farming decline. Note trends in agricultural output (blue and red lines) compared with land clearing reforms as measured by clearing rates (black line)



Sources: ABS Cat. No. 7503.0 - Value of Agricultural Commodities Produced, Australia - Queensland data, various years; ABS Cat. No. 6401.0 Consumer Price Index, Australia - June Quarter, various years; DTSITI/DNRM Queensland SLATS Reports data, various years

The Bill currently in Parliament and the subject of this Inquiry is a vital step in bringing destructive and unnecessary land clearing back under control in Queensland. The Wilderness Society strongly believes the Bill should be passed, and ideally amended to make it stronger. Specifically, in terms of the current Committee Inquiry and the Bill, we recommend that the Agriculture and Environment Committee:

- 1. Accept that Queensland has a substantial land clearing problem in 2016 which requires urgent action.**
- 2. Support the passing of *Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016* as an important step in bringing clearing in Queensland back under control.**
- 3. Propose amendment to the Bill to remove s3(1)(h) ('Sustainable land use') from the Purposes of the *Vegetation Management Act 1999***
- 4. Propose amendment to the Bill to create a new clause to amend the Schedule Dictionary, definition of 'high value regrowth vegetation' within the *Vegetation Management Act 1999*, such that (b) reads "in an area that has not been cleared for the previous 20 years", instead of making reference to "since 31 December 1989".**
- 5. Propose amendment to the Bill to create a new clause which provides the Herbarium and Department of Environment and Heritage Protection with Concurrence Powers in regard to the setting of codes and assessment provisions, and changes to the regulatory map.**
- 6. Propose amendment to the Bill to create a new clause which provides that greenhouse gas emissions be considered as a relevant factor during the assessment of any development applications for land clearing.**
- 7. Urge the Queensland government, and Parliament, to ensure legislative reform is accompanied by regular publishing and updating of regulatory maps and public registers for all clearing under Codes, development approvals and other types.**
- 8. Acknowledge the role that reducing land clearing and increasing woodland coverage can play in reducing carbon emissions, reducing the rate of climate change, and potentially reducing local effects on rainfall and drought.**
- 9. Urge the Queensland government, and Parliament, to support action on 'trees and carbon' through the establishment of a formal taskforce to examine how a combination of regulation, market incentives and Federal/State policy initiatives can be used to support further protection of woodlands, higher sequestration of carbon in woodlands, and income streams for landholders through woodland retention, regeneration and revegetation.**

2. Introduction

This Submission from The Wilderness Society examines the *Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016* (hereinafter ‘the Bill’), currently being Inquired into by the Agriculture and Environment Committee (hereinafter ‘the Committee’).

The Wilderness Society has noted that there are no formal terms of reference for the Committee’s Inquiry. Accordingly, this submission considers the relevance of relevant matters in historical and more contemporary contexts of land clearing in Queensland, and seeks to comment on the Bill directly, the issues it raises and the claims that have been made about it and the broader impacts law reform might have.

The submission concludes with recommendations for the Committee to consider during its Inquiry and in its report back to the Queensland Parliament at the end of June 2016.

3. History of engagement with land clearing issues

The Wilderness Society is one of Australia’s leading conservation organisations, with a long history of engagement and practice in Queensland environmental policy and legislative development, including land clearing and vegetation management legislation. We are a widely recognised stakeholder on land clearing issues, and have made submissions and appearances at previous Parliamentary Committee processes on this and a number of other issues.

We have previously provided advice and feedback to the Department of Natural Resources and Mines on earlier proposals for land clearing law reform legislation, and along with other agricultural and conservation groups, we were consulted on a draft version of this Bill. It may be of interest to the Committee to note that our organisation generated more than 10,000 hand signed letters to the Queensland Government on need for a reform Bill prior to its introduction.

We have appreciated the space to present our views with current government agencies and Ministers, and with other stakeholders, and we look forward to a similar constructive engagement with the Committee.

4. Background and context to land clearing issues in Queensland

Land clearing (also referred to as ‘tree clearing’ and the less direct ‘vegetation management’) is an important and often emotive issue, one that sadly appears to be an ongoing battleground between those who look backwards conservatively on social, economic and environmental issues, and those who looks forwards to modernised, progressive and innovative law and policy around both environmental protection, land use and agriculture.

Land clearing involves both large scale destruction of native woodlands and the incremental removal of trees and other vegetation, including regenerating woodlands that have been cleared before. Land clearing directly kills wildlife and plants, destroys habitats for many animals and birds including endangered species, causes erosion and land degradation, and releases large volumes of carbon into the atmosphere. It is a significant environmental issue.

Land clearing and logging were always part of Queensland's history of white settlement, but it was commonly done by axe or saw. Clearing reached its peak from the 1950s thanks to the pioneering work of Joh Bjelke-Peterson and his use of ex-tanks as bulldozers, dragging huge chains to effect clearing on a truly massive scale. More land was cleared in Queensland in the fifty years after 1945 than in the previous one hundred and fifty years. By the 1990s, we were seeing more than half a million hectares of native woodlands being cleared every year. Queensland was the 'land clearing capital of Australia', and in relative terms was up there with Brazil in terms of proportions of trees cleared and trees remaining.

Joh Bjelke-Petersen clearing land on his property in the 1940s¹



Recent (suspected illegal) clearing by bulldozer, south of Carnarvon, Central Qld



¹ <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/campbell-newmans-lnp-bulldozing-pre-election-promise/story-fn59niix-1226654740183>

It was clear this was unsustainable, and incompatible with progressive policies for environmental protection and land/natural resource management. But clearing was bound up in landholder property rights and the ‘felt’ entitlements of farmers, so the process of legislating on land clearing was fraught and contentious from the start. The *Land Act 1994* proved unable to offer any solution, so it was the minority Beattie government that really got the ball rolling on the *Vegetation Management Act* (VMA) in 1999. It was a tentative start to regulating clearing, in part due to the politics of the time, but whilst it produced a slowing of clearing, it evidently was not strong enough to prevent ongoing broadscale land clearing in Queensland.



Above and below: land clearing, Queensland style!



The Beattie Government used the 2004 state election and its subsequent thumping win as the catalyst for further legislative reform. Amendments to the *Vegetation Management Act* were passed with the endorsement of the Liberal Party in Parliament and Independent MP Peter Wellington in 2005, but were vigorously opposed by the old guard of the National Party². Key larger scale agriculture lobby group AgForce participated in the legislative negotiations and seemingly supported the deals and compromises that ensued. To placate them and others, clearing of 500,000 hectares of remnant bushland by ballot was allowed, and \$150 million in compensation and industry adjustment provided, including \$8M sector reform awareness and training given to AgForce.

The purposes of the amended legislation were to conserve remnant vegetation, including endangered and 'of concern' regional ecosystems, through the ending of broadscale clearing by the close of 2006; prevent land degradation and biodiversity loss; control and reduce clearing rates; and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. As occurred in 1999, the reforms were accompanied by a spike in clearing rates, due to accelerated or 'panic' land clearing as well as still-permitted clearing. Notwithstanding this, some 20 million hectares of native woodlands were spared the 'dozer-and-chain' treatment, and the wildlife that rely on them for habitats were given a better chance of survival. The Howard Liberal government was also able to subsequently claim it had met its implicit Kyoto target, but only because of the carbon sequestration from stronger land clearing regulation in Queensland.

The Bligh government further backed-in Queensland's land clearing controls with additional restrictions on the clearing of higher conservation value regenerating native vegetation ('regrowth') in 2010, following its re-election the year before. The pre 2012 legislative model of protecting remnant and regrowing native vegetation, under the *Vegetation Management Act 1999*, represented good public and environmental policy, which by 2010 and 2011 was successful in bringing down land clearing rates in Queensland to the lowest levels in modern times.

A lot has been said recently about the reasons to oppose land clearing reform, and these will be covered in more detail below. However, it is important that the Committee resists the temptation to treat any of the self-evidently ridiculous claims with any respect.

Apocalyptic statements such as "we're all going to starve", "this is the end of agriculture", "farmers will not be allowed to do anything on the land", "this will hold back Indigenous prosperity" and so on – which have all featured in recent media pieces in conservative and agricultural publications - cannot be taken seriously by any sensible, reasonable-minded person. They are, however, helpful indicators of the hype and fear that has been put out in rural communities by AgForce, their supporters and some elements of the Queensland LNP, about moderate, cautious legislative amendments that have already been in place before without the sky falling in.

² <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/campbell-newmans-lnp-bulldozing-pre-election-promise/story-fn59niix-1226654740183>

5. Legislative and policy State of play pre-2012

The core aspects of the legislation by 2012 were a ban on broadscale clearing of remnant vegetation (larger scale destruction of native woodlands), the regulation of clearing of high conservation value regrowing vegetation (which had not been cleared since 1989), and was commonly on degraded landscapes or in riparian areas, but the largely unregulated clearing of ‘least concern’ regrowth, coupled with a number of exemptions, including clearing for development under the Sustainable Planning Act; fences, roads or tracks, firebreaks and fire management lines, and the establishment or maintenance of infrastructure.

The stated Purposes of the Act (2012) were as follows:

- “(1) The purpose of this Act is to regulate the clearing of vegetation in a way that—
- (a) conserves remnant vegetation that is—
 - (i) an endangered regional ecosystem; or
 - (ii) an of concern regional ecosystem; or
 - (iii) a least concern regional ecosystem; and
 - (b) conserves vegetation in declared areas; and
 - (c) ensures the clearing does not cause land degradation; and
 - (d) prevents the loss of biodiversity; and
 - (e) maintains ecological processes; and
 - (f) manages the environmental effects of the clearing to achieve the matters mentioned in paragraphs (a) to (e); and
 - (g) reduces greenhouse gas emissions.”

These were important objectives, which created the potential for addressing loss of biodiversity, protection of tree species, landscape and ecological integrity, and limiting carbon emissions from clearing. Given the relative cautiousness of the legislation and the volume of clearing that was still allowed (and which occurred), it can hardly be claimed that this was a radical piece of law, nor a completely effective one. The Act needed strengthening rather than weakening by 2012. Nevertheless, clearing rates were reduced by 2009/10 to some 78,000 hectares pa, probably the lowest level for at least a century, if not since the very start of European colonisation of what became Queensland.

6. Changes to land clearing laws and processes 2012-15, and their consequences

The Newman LNP government was elected in March 2012 on the back of a clear commitment to “retain the current level of statutory vegetation protection”³. Indeed, newly appointed Minister for Natural Resources Andrew Cripps was presented with his Ministerial Charter Letter on 10 April 2012, but no reference was included nor mention made of an intention to fundamentally change the *Vegetation Management Act 1999*.

Regrettably though, the Newman government wasted little time from this point in undermining the effectiveness of the Act. Minister Cripps quickly weakened monitoring and enforcement, and sent a clear message to the rural community that clearing was essentially to

³ Correspondence to conservation groups, but also publicly stated: <https://youtu.be/V25qDAH40Lw>

be encouraged. A subsequent report, only released after the LNP lost power, highlighted the attempt to shift the culture and the framing of land clearing in Queensland:⁴

“Clearing trends were also likely to be driven by a shift in clearing culture and perceptions brought about by the change in government in 2012. The change in landholder perceptions was supported by a new compliance approach, introduced soon after the change in government in 2012. The Department of Natural Resources and Mines shifted the priority to assisting landholders to undertake clearing rather than the previous priority on assessment and compliance.”⁵

It is of little surprise that of approximately 1,400 notifications of clearing irregularities during the 2012-14 period, only three prosecutions commenced and only one was ever concluded.⁶ The legacy of this has taken some time to address, and in 2015 despite some 200 notifications, and some 67 more formal investigations, again only one prosecution resulted⁷.

There were also changes to clearing codes. The Newman Government replaced the requirement for clearing permits with self-assessable codes for thinning remnant bushland, clearing encroaching woodland and fodder harvesting (mulga) within four regions (under Area Management Plans).

Bulldozing and clearing native woodland in Central Queensland (pic: Wayne Lawler)



⁴ Also important to note that no SLATS data were ever released by the LNP, and if they were still in government, it is quite likely we still would be none the wiser regarding official clearing statistics.

⁵ <https://publications.qld.gov.au/dataset/supplementary-report-to-the-statewide-landcover-and-trees-study-report-2012-14>.

⁶ Agriculture, Resources And Environment Committee, Estimates Pre-Hearing Non-Government Answer to Question On Notice No. 9 asked on 25 June 2014

⁷ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-02-25/illegal-land-clearing-prosecution-queensland-figures/7201246>

However, the most direct impact on land clearing in Queensland came from changes made to *Vegetation Management Act* itself in 2013. Announced through an aggressively titled speech⁸ ‘Taking an Axe to Queensland’s Tree Clearing Laws’, the stated intent of the *Vegetation Management Framework Amendment Act 2013* was:

- “reduce red tape and regulatory burden on landholders, business and government;
- support the four pillar economy - construction, resources, agriculture and tourism; and
- maintain protection and management of Queensland’s native vegetation resources.”

It was claimed “Amending the vegetation management framework will support economic growth and the four pillar economy, particularly in the areas of agriculture and construction while maintaining protections for our important native vegetation.”⁹

In fact, there was no evidence presented that the prevailing vegetation management provisions were having unreasonable or unnecessary impacts landholders, business and government.

The real intent of this legislative change was to undermine the existing ban on broadscale land-clearing of remnant and regrowing native vegetation via the creation of a series of exemptions, loopholes, relaxation of regulations, and reduction and removal of enforcement provision. A new category of broadscale clearing by permit under the rubric of ‘high value agriculture’ was created to allow the clearing of hundreds of thousands of hectares of remnant vegetation, and the protection of 700,000 ha of high value regrowth was deregulated completely.

The high value agriculture permit process was almost an open-slayer invitation to clear with little real criteria to satisfy, and landholders could drive a truck – and a couple of bulldozers for that matter – through the system. Whole made to give the impression of “high value cropping”, no definition of high value agriculture was developed, and all applications approved are for dryland sorghum (pasture crop or haying) and similar. Whether much of this ever occurs is also a valid question given the location of much of the land in question.

To date, some 130,000 hectares of native woodlands have been slated for clearing for so-called high value agriculture via permits granted, most of which is destined to become grazing paddocks or degraded dust bowls. We have already witnessed the rapid clearing of some 60,000 ha in northern Queensland, none of which has involved prior referral to the Federal Department of Environment, for assessment under the Environmental Protection Conservation Act, despite the mapped presence of threatened species and other matters of national environmental significance. Strathmore has since been under investigation.¹⁰ Clearing at Olive Vale appeared to pause while such a referral was made, but it is not known where this process is at now.¹¹

⁸ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-04-17/call-to-scrap-qld-tree-clearing-law-changes/4634060>

⁹ Explanatory Notes for *Vegetation Management Framework Amendment Bill 2013*

¹⁰ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-11-22/land-clearing-investigated-for-legal-breaches-environment-damage/6961108>

¹¹ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-06-04/queensland-government-steps-in-to-stop-olive-vale-land-clearing/6521928>

To augment these changes, the Purpose of the *Vegetation Management Act* was amended. Section 3(1) of the Vegetation Management Act was changed, adding a new Purpose of allowing “sustainable land use”. This was flawed on two grounds. Firstly, “sustainable land use” was and still is not defined anywhere in the Bill, and without further definition it had to be concluded that it was effectively Minister Cripps who determined whether something was or was not a sustainable land use. This established an unacceptable level of arbitrariness in the legislation.

The second issue with this proposed additional purpose is even more fundamental. Introducing as a purpose to effectively clear remnant native vegetation on the grounds of supporting “sustainable land use” completely undermined and was / is wholly inconsistent and incompatible with the existing purposes of the Vegetation Management Act, as laid out in s3(1). “Sustainable land use” should never have been accepted as a legitimate purpose of the *Vegetation Management Act*.

To further ensure its effectiveness in commencing the dismantling of land clearing controls, other Acts were also modified. The *Water Act* was changed, removing the requirement for Riverine Protection Permits to clear in-stream native vegetation between the defining banks of watercourses. These permits were replaced exemptions, self-assessable codes and new development assessment codes under the *Sustainable Planning Act*. That Act was also changed such that the Minister and Department for Planning were given sole approval powers for development applications for clearing of native vegetation.

Finally, landholder deemed liability was removed from the *Vegetation Management Act*, and the ‘honest mistake and withholding of self-incriminating documents defences in regard to prosecutions’ were allowed under the Act.

Suspected illegal clearing of remnant woodlands in central Queensland (pic: N Frazier)



The Wilderness Society opposed the principles which sat behind the *Vegetation Management Framework Amendment Act 2013* and its intent, believing it would prove to be an act of environmental vandalism in the form of rapidly rising clearing rates, the return of broadscale clearing via bulldozers and chains, and the associated destruction of habitats, wildlife and carbon stores. More broadly, conservation groups began to fear that the LNP’s land clearing ‘reform’ agenda had only just started, and that more radical deregulation was likely to come.



Above: intact savannah woodlands close to those found at Olive Vale on Cape York (Pic: Kerry Trapnell), below clearing at Olive Vale, Cape York (pic: Kerry Trapnell / TWS)





Above: intact savannah woodlands on Cape York (York (pic: Kerry Trapnell), below: clearing at Olive Vale, CY (York (pic: Kerry Trapnell / TWS). It turns out the destruction of these ecologically vital woodlands was undertaken to produce hay!





Above: intact savannah woodlands in the northern gulf area of Queensland, close to Strathmore Station. Below: massive clearing at Strathmore. Images supplied to TWS.





Clearing at Strathmore has been undertaken on a truly massive scale: 58,000 hectares (equivalent of 58,000 pitches at Lang Park!) was cleared by bulldozers and chain, most in just a few months in 2015. This dramatic case of broadscale clearing was permitted under the LNP's high value agriculture permit system. Images supplied to TWS.



‘Known instances of clearing of native vegetation that lost protection (‘deprotected’), or were unexplained and High Value Agriculture approvals, 2012 to 2015’¹²



Mapping by Dr Martin Taylor (WWF Australia), and used with permission.

Large red markers indicate High Value Agriculture approvals granted since Feb 2015. Small red markers indicate High Value Agriculture approvals granted prior to Feb 2015. Large yellow markers indicate detected instances of unexplained clearing or clearing of de-protected vegetation for 2014-15. Small yellow markers indicate the same thing for the period 2012-2014.

¹² https://fusiontables.googleusercontent.com/fusiontables/embedviz?q=select+col9+from+1iEHc2QyUeWQAcqsY2ZM27cVbW9ZM4qoiRiKfqnc4&viz=MAP&h=false&lat=-21.664429022905434&lng=148.24093731689447&t=1&z=6&l=col9&y=2&tmplt=2&hml=TWO_COL_LAT_LNG

‘Threatened species habitat cleared in Queensland 2012-14’¹³



Mapping by Dr Martin Taylor (WWF Australia), and used with permission.

Large pins show 100 ha or more forest cleared. Small dots show 10-99 ha cleared. WWF overlapped Queensland Government maps of landclearing from 2012-2014 (SLATS) with Australian Government habitat maps for threatened species, to identify properties where more than 5 ha of threatened species habitat was lost.

¹³ <https://www.google.com/fusiontables/data?docid=1MN2fAcQBEuaMcO4PypI2o2GE5tQvSyCJu2fZa2-W#map:id=3>

So, although the Newman LNP Government was elected in 2012 on a platform that included a commitment to “not reduce the statutory level of protection” on native woodlands, it clearly broke that promise and amended the Act precisely to reintroduce broadscale clearing through so-called high value agriculture permits, and deregulated high value regrowth clearing. While, in a historic turnaround, that government was kicked out of office two years later, the legacy of the LNP’s changes has been a rapid rise in clearing rates, habitat destruction, and associated carbon emissions.

7. Key reasons why land clearing reform is essential in 2016 and beyond

There can be no doubting that Queensland has seen a rapid rise in clearing rates in the last few years, and that the LNP’s changes to the *Vegetation Management Act*, and associated Codes, monitoring, reporting and enforcement, are the direct cause of this. As the following graph illustrates, while the trend in clearing rates was very much down from the mid-2000s, following progressive law reform, clearing rates started to rise again post LNP changes.

Thus, we have seen land clearing rates in Queensland increase from a low point of some 78,000 ha in 2009/10 to just under 300,000 in 2013/14. In fact, remnant clearing nearly doubled following the changes to Self-Assessable Codes and compliance in 2012. The latest SLATS ¹⁴ Report indicates that between 2011/12 and 2012/13, clearing of remnant woody vegetation increased from 34,588 hectares to 59,776 hectares. Following the legislative changes in 2013, remnant clearing virtually doubled again to 103,308 hectares.

Overall, there can be no question that the LNP’s changes to clearing laws allowed for a lot more clearing, and indeed were designed to do just that. While remnant clearing did increase prior the changes of the Newman LNP’s legislative changes, the government’s changes to self-assessable codes for fodder harvesting and thinning, and its weakening of enforcement allowed this to occur.

What all these changes achieved in a relatively short time was the highest rate of clearing in Queensland for over a decade, and the first rapid rise in clearing trends for two decades. These trends and their impacts have been covered substantially in the media and social commentary, and have also been acknowledged in numerous government statements and in other Queensland, national and international forums.

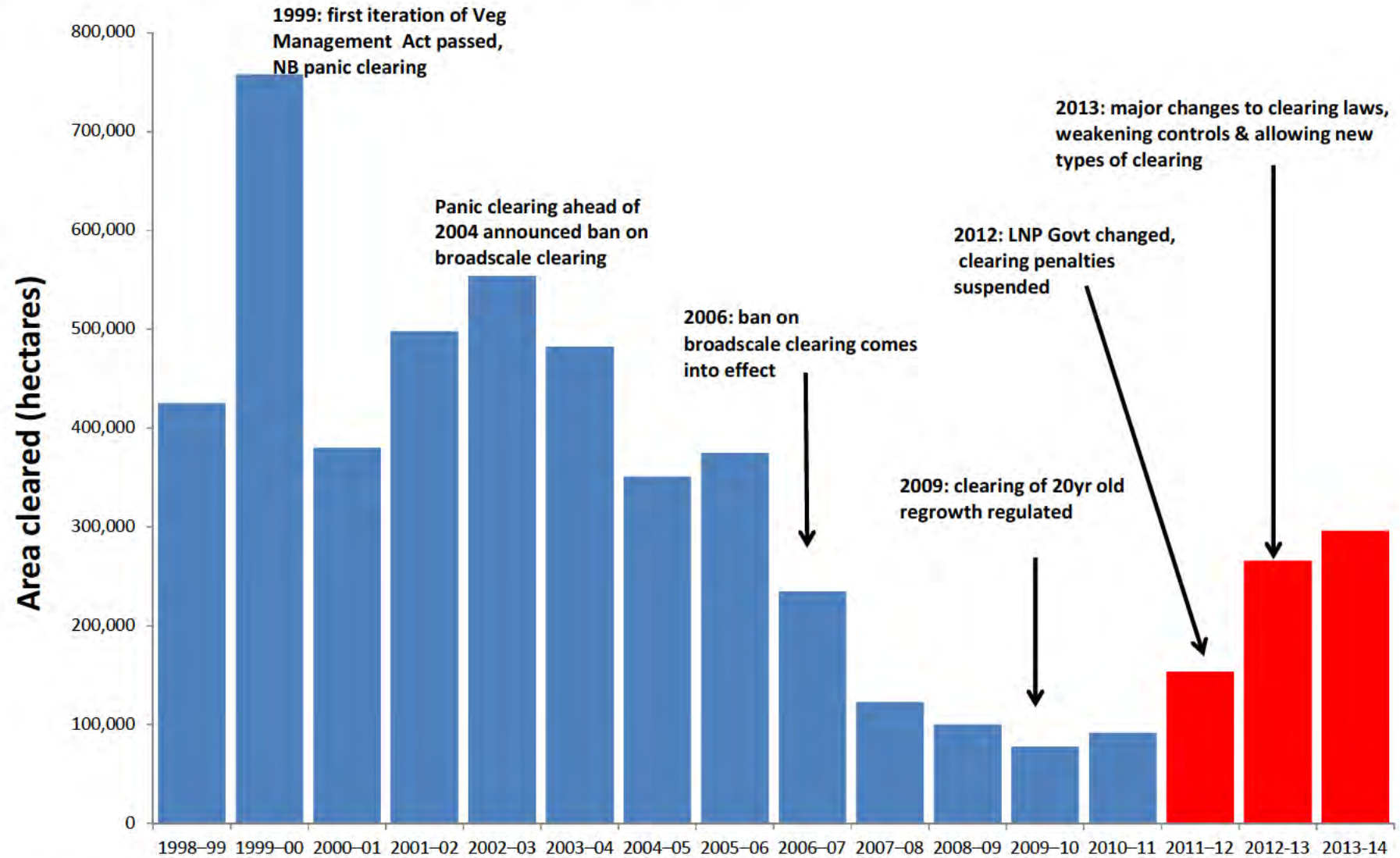
The Queensland Auditor General in 2015 highlighted the risks of land clearing laws being weakened, and observed that increased clearing in Great Barrier Reef catchments “*coincided with the policy change to reduce compliance activities.*”¹⁵ Land clearing law reform is also a component of the Reef 2050 Queensland Commonwealth Plan for protecting the Great Barrier Reef, and is included in commitments to UNESCO in relation to the health of the Reef.

¹⁴ Queensland Department of Science, Information Technology and Innovation. 2015. Land cover change in Queensland 2012–13 and 2013–14: Statewide Landcover and Trees Study (SLATS) report:

<https://publications.qld.gov.au/dataset/land-cover-change-in-qld-2012-13-2013-14/resource/db43b755-0a44-4b50-8d76-51c5c55da357>

¹⁵ <https://www.qao.qld.gov.au/files/file/Reports%20and%20publications/Reports%20to%20Parliament%202014-15/RtP20GreatBarrierReef.pdf>

Clearing rates in Queensland and law reform events 1998/89 – 2013/14.



Source: DTSITI/DNRM Queensland SLATS Reports data, various years

Queensland tree clearing and emissions 2004–2014

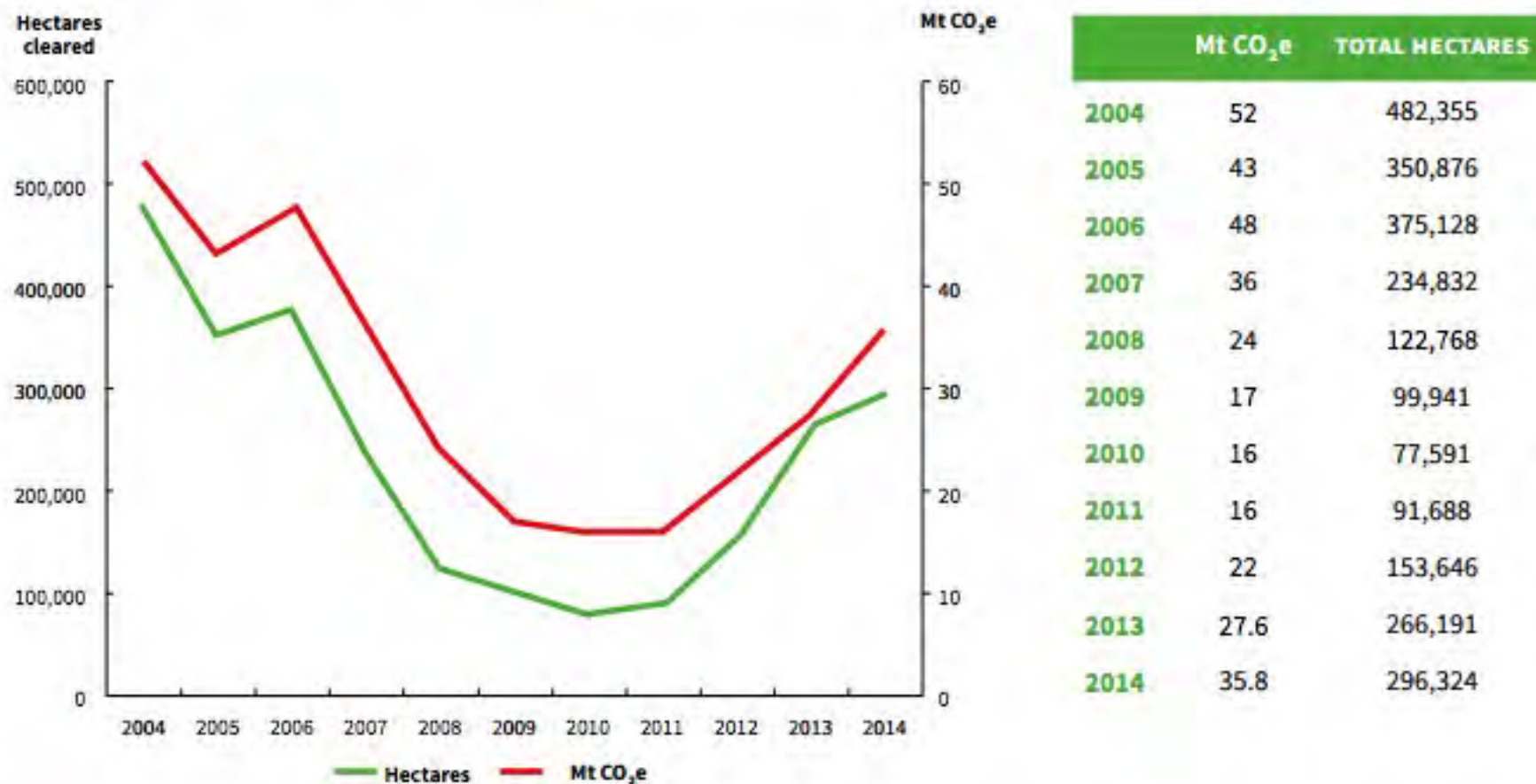


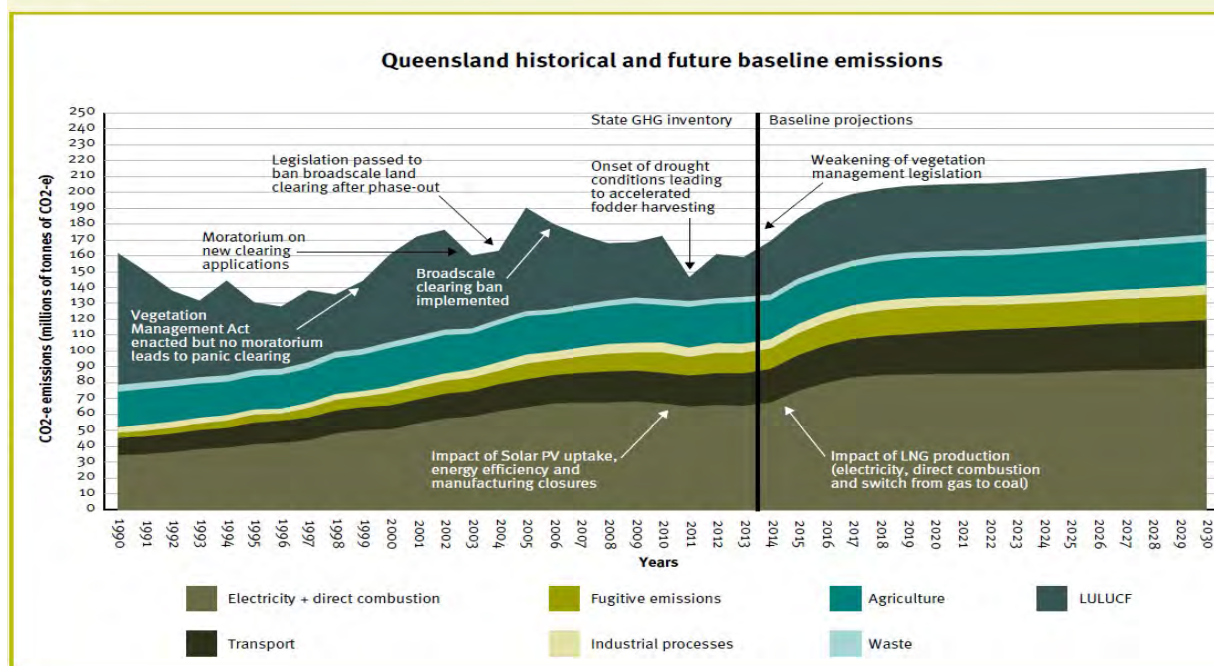
FIGURE 2. Tree clearing and emissions in Queensland from 2004–2014.⁵ In the absence of Australian Government tree clearing data from 2013 onwards and with questions around the Australian Government's data overall (see Box 1), this figure is the most illustrative of the upsurge in tree clearing and emissions, with table data also supplied. This is particularly pertinent as Queensland is consistently the single largest contributor of national tree clearing rates and emissions. NOTE: 2014 denotes fiscal year 2013–14, and so on.

Clearing in central and northern east coast catchments is clearly bad for the Great Barrier Reef in a direct water quality sense, but clearing is also bad for the climate, which impacts on the Reef and on farmers as well as the broader community. Greenhouse gas emissions from land clearing are a significant contributor to climate change in Queensland, and are wiping out the impact of Australia's current Federal climate policies. In 2013-14 alone, land clearing in Queensland resulted in 35.8 million tonnes of greenhouse gases being released into the atmosphere – equivalent to 6% of Australia's total emissions during that period.¹⁶ At this rate, tree clearing in Queensland will have wiped out the entire LULUCF abatement achieved through the Federal Emissions Reduction Fund to date in just 18 months.¹⁷

Without intervention, such increases in emissions from tree clearing are likely to continue and will put Australia's ability to meet its obligations under the Paris agreement at risk. According to independent modelling by carbon accounting firm CO2 Australia, if the current tree clearing trend in Queensland continues, by 2030 cumulative tree clearing emissions could be up to 268 million tonnes higher than current Government estimates.¹⁸ This is the equivalent to operating an additional 4 coal-fired power stations during the same period.¹⁹

The Queensland government's own emissions projections confirm this future assessment, as indicated in its report on emissions in the absence of reform, especially in Figure 3 below.²⁰

FIGURE 3



¹⁶ The Wilderness Society, "Climate Change and Australia's Tree Clearing Crisis", 2016.

<https://www.wilderness.org.au/sites/default/files/PDFS/TWS%20-%20Climate%20change%20and%20Australia's%20tree%20clearing%20crisis.pdf>

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ CO2 Australia, "Tree Clearing in Australia: Its Contribution to Climate Change", 2016, p. 28

<https://www.wilderness.org.au/sites/default/files/PDFS/CO2%20Lead%20Report.pdf>

¹⁹ The Wilderness Society, "Climate Change and Australia's Tree Clearing Crisis", 2016.

²⁰ Carbon Pollution Projections: Queensland's baseline greenhouse gas emissions projections to 2030
<http://www.chp.qld.gov.au/assets/documents/climate-pollution-projections.pdf>

Clearing is clearly bad for biodiversity (plant species, wildlife and habitats). The sorts of threatened species likely to be impacted by land clearing include the koala, the Northern Quoll, the Greater Bilby, the Mahogany Glider, the Northern Bettong, the Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby, the Red Goshawk, and the Buff Breasted Button Quail to name a few.

Clearing is also bad for erosion and attempts to keep landscapes intact.

Fundamentally, with the LNP's changes, the *Vegetation Management Act* is not able to fulfil its purposes.

In response, Labor approached the 2015 election with a clear statement of intent to restore land clearing laws to a pre-2012 level, and the issue featured in the election. Labor position was no secret:

"Labor is absolutely committed to protecting Queensland's native woodlands...Labor will ensure legislation ensures proper protection clearing...We will reinstate the nation-leading vegetation protection laws repealed by the Newman Government. In addition we will reintroduce riverine protection permits to guard against excessive clearing of riparian vegetation. These laws will reduce the clearing of native vegetation and contribute to our effort to reduce sediment run-off."

The Bill before Parliament essentially restores the legal situation pre 2012. The one actual advancement over the pre-2012 legislative situation is the extension of riparian areas from some, to all Great Barrier Reef catchments – a necessary change in the context of protecting the reef and improving water quality.

Recent references have been made in the conservative media about a letter²¹, sent in late 2015, from three conservation groups to the Deputy Premier about the need and ideal scope of land clearing reform. Far from being 'uncovered', this letter has been on The Wilderness Society's website since being mailed, and is no great secret. Unlike AgForce Qld - the largest agricultural lobby group - which has made a series of quite inconsistent statements over the years²², the conservation sector has been honest and sincere in its approach to land clearing.

It is also worth noting that a key policy advisor of AgForce Qld was previously Chief of Staff to former Minister Cripps, that the President of AgForce Qld has now highlighted his personal interests and gains from the LNP's changes²³, and the so-called soils expert who backed most of the so-called high value agriculture permit applications has similarly highlighted his personal interests and gains from the LNP's changes²⁴.

²¹ See Letter attachment

²² <http://www.queenslandcountrylife.com.au/story/3859032/opinion-time-for-land-clearing-reforms-to-be-accepted/>

²³ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-04-28/queensland-land-clear-laws-commonwealth-takeover-unfair/7365286>

²⁴ See P Spies Letter to the Innisfail Advocate, 23 April 2016



**Above: gully erosion from clearing in western Queensland (pic supplied by N Frazier) ,
below gully erosion on a huge scale in the Bowen River area (GBR catchment) from
clearing, cattle grazing and run off (Pic supplied by Andrew Brooks)**



8. Analysis of the Bill clause by clause

The Wilderness Society has examined the Bill in detail, and offers the following analysis, Clause by Clause:

Clause	Effect	Comment
Clause 2	Commencement	Vital. Support for the retrospectivity, although not clear why this did not include clause 6.
Clause 3(1)	change of heading of s22A VMA	Vital.
Clause 3(2) and (3)	redefines 'reasons for clearing' as being for "relevant purposes" in s22A(2) VMA	Vital.
Clause 3(4)	deletion of Section 22A(2)(k) and (l) VMA	Vital. Removes 'high value agriculture' and 'irrigated high value agriculture' from the list of relevant purposes for clearing.
Clause 4(5) and (7)	wording change to s22A(2AA) / s22A(2B) VMA	Vital. Redefines references in the VMA and Cape York Peninsula Heritage Act 2007 to vegetation clearing applications, to now read "development".
Clause 4(6), (8) and (12)	wording change to s22A(2AA) / s22A(2B) / s22A(2C) VMA	Vital. Removes the words "applied for" in references in the VMA and the Cape York Peninsula Heritage Act 2007 "development".
Clause 4(9)	amendment of s22A(2B(a) VMA	Vital. Reregulates the protection of high conservation value regrowing native woodlands ('regrowth vegetation') on freehold, leasehold and Indigenous land).
Clause 4(10), (11) and (13)	amendment of s22A(2B(b) and (c) / s22A(2AC) VMA	Vital. Changes references to applications and instead applies where development occurs
Clause 5	deletion of Part 2, division 6, subdivision 1A VMA	Vital. Removes references to high value agriculture and irrigated high value agriculture from the VMA
Clause 6	new s67A VMA	Vital. Re-establishes the initial presumption of someone (owner or occupier) of land being deemed responsible for clearing, depending on tenure. Also clarifies that the 'oops' defence sometimes available under the Criminal Code does not apply to illegal clearing prosecutions
Clause 7	Transitional provisions and processes	Vital. Interim procedures for dealing with Category X in PMAVs, and areas proposed to become Category C (high value regrowth) and Category R (regrowth in riparian zones in GBR catchments) from 17 March (only existing applications dealt with under pre-Bill conditions). NB the list of GBR catchments is extended to now include protection of regrowth vegetation in watercourse areas in Burnett-Mary, Eastern Cape

		York and Fitzroy Great Barrier Reef catchments. Also empowers CE of DNR to make restoration orders on illegal clearing. Also stresses changes do not attract compensation.
Clause 8	definitions in VMA	Vital. Removes references to high value ag, and re-instates the definition of high value regrowth to include freehold and Indigenous land (thereby re-protecting this). NB the list of GBR catchments is extended to now include protection of regrowth vegetation in watercourse areas in Burnett-Mary, Eastern Cape York and Fitzroy Great Barrier Reef catchments.
Clauses 9 / 10	Transitional provisions in SPA	Vital. Ensures consistency between changes in the VMA and SPA in terms of how applications to clear or develop are treated, and clarifies that unlawful clearing during interim period is not “an offence”.
Clause 11	Prohibited development under SPA	Vital.
Clauses 12 – 15	Riverine permits for clearing under WA	Vital. Reintroduces riverine protection permits to the Water Act
Clauses 16 – 19	treatment of quarry materials under WA	Vital. Supports powers to enter and investigate treatment of quarry materials under the Water Act
Clauses 20 – 30 / 35	Changes to the Environmental Offsets Act 2014	Support as ancillary to the vital sections to the Bill. Removes references to “significant” in terms of residual impacts of activities to be offset.
Clause 31	How offsets work under Commonwealth processes	Support as ancillary to the vital sections to the Bill.
Clauses 32 – 34	Transitional arrangements under Offsets Act	Support as ancillary to the vital sections to the Bill.

The Wilderness Society believes however that there are some matters missing from the Bill:

- A Clause that removes the addition of ‘sustainable land use’ from the Purposes of the VM Act, given that this was added by the previous government to undermine the achievement of the other Purposes, and that it remains undefined.
- A Clause which provides the Herbarium and Department of Environment and Heritage Protection with Concurrence Powers in regard to the setting of codes and assessment provisions, and changes to the regulatory map
- A Clause which provides that greenhouse gas emissions be considered as a relevant factor during the assessment of any development applications for land clearing

We also believe legislative reform should also be accompanied by regular publishing and updating of regulatory maps and public registers for all clearing under both codes and development approvals.

9. Addressing the myths and misconceptions about land clearing reform

There has been no consultation

Labor's position on reforms to the *Vegetation Management Act* has been well-known for several years. As the originator of the Act itself and its progressive development until 2012, Labor has been a champion of land clearing reform, notwithstanding the limited application that such reforms have had in practice. When the LNP weakened enforcement in 2012, and then changed the Act in 2013, Labor's opposition to this was quite clear²⁵. In the run up to the 2015 state election²⁶, during that election²⁷, and afterwards²⁸, Labor's position was quite clear. The government has been very transparent about its legislative and policy intent.

From Ministerial diaries and media comments, it is quite clear that the Minister for Natural Resources and the Deputy Premier have both met with AgForce and have discussed land clearing policies and issues. Similarly, these Ministers have also met with conservation groups on the same basis. It is understood that AgForce was invited to view an exposure draft of the Bill, as was The Wilderness Society, prior to its introduction. Such courtesies were not extended to conservation groups under the LNP government on any legislation.

While it has been stated that there were no roundtable discussions between conservationists and agricultural groups, there was in fact a meeting convened on 13 July 2015 by the then Director-General, Department of Natural Resources and Mines which was attended by a number of key stakeholders and agencies, including representatives of AgForce, Queensland Farmers Federation, The Wilderness Society, WWF Australia, Environmental Defenders Office Qld, Advisors from various Ministerial offices including Natural Resources, Environment, Agriculture, Premiers, and a number of Department Natural Resources and Mines officials. It was made clear to conservation groups at that meeting that the agricultural sector representatives were not willing to countenance the government's intended land clearing reforms.

It is also important to bear in mind that in the mid-2000s there was an extensive process of consultation, dialogue, negotiation and compromise around the extent of land clearing law reform and how it would be implemented. These were changes that were foreshadowed during the 2004 state election. While providing stronger controls over broadscale clearing, it

²⁵ See Parliamentary debates and votes on LNP changes to the VMA in 2013

²⁶ Queensland Labor, Saving the Great Barrier Reef: Labor's plan to protect a natural wonder, January 2015, plus correspondence

²⁷ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-01-20/queensland-election-2015-queensland-labor-campaign-launch/6027742> <http://www.queenslandcountrylife.com.au/story/3367540/labors-tree-clearing-threat/> <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-01-21/alp-reignites-landclearing-debate/6032484>

²⁸ <http://rti.cabinet.qld.gov.au/ministers/assets/charter-letter-lynham.pdf>

was recognised that this would not end clearing in Queensland. Nevertheless, the government effectively compensated landholders to the tune of some \$133 million through several rural adjustment programs, AgForce was provided with \$8 million to assist with education and adjustment to the new regulations, and there was a ballot for an additional 500,000 hectares of clearing. Protections for high conservation value regenerating woodlands in 2009/10 were similarly introduced through dialogue and consultation, having been foreshadowed during the 2009 state election.

The LNP's changes to these regulations were **not** foreshadowed during the 2012 state election – in fact the very opposite was the case²⁹ – and there was no consultation with conservation groups about the legislation other than a Parliamentary Inquiry process where our concerns were completely dismissed, despite them being proved correct subsequently. The current Bill seeks to reinstate protections that existed prior to 2012, and these reinstituted reforms **were** foreshadowed during the 2015 state election.

- *The Bill is the result of a grubby deal between Labor and the Greens*

As the above information indicates, the government has been completely transparent with its position and intent. This can be contrasted with the LNP when in government, which explicitly promised it would not reduce the prevailing level of statutory protection for native vegetation, and then did just that.³⁰ The government's Bill is about good policy, not politics.

- *There has been an increase in woodlands and trees in Queensland*

This claim is based on a misunderstanding of the distinction between real woodlands and more established vegetation cleared, and the basic count of almost anything green, leafy or vegetation more than a foot high which DSITI included in one of its tables within its SLATS report. There is no meaningful comparison between the verified figure of 296,000 hectares of native woodland cleared in 2013/14 and the notional count of 437,000 hectares of increased woody vegetation over the same period.

Unlike SLATS clearing data, it is understood the latter figure is not ground-rested, and captures anything with a foliage projective coverage (FPC) rate above 0%, which will include short (metre high) regrowth, increased leaf cover, and other forms of 'green growth' visible from satellite imagery likely to be wet-weather induced.³¹ The SLATS report directly cautions³², "It is important to note that clearing figures cannot be derived by comparing wooded extent from year to year", and we are aware of advice from DSITI that "While some land cover change may be detected in the FPC processing, this product is not designed to generate clearing or regrowth following clearing layers, and should not be used to assess clearing or be compared with previous years for change monitoring".

²⁹ See Newman campaign video <https://youtu.be/V25qDAH40Lw>

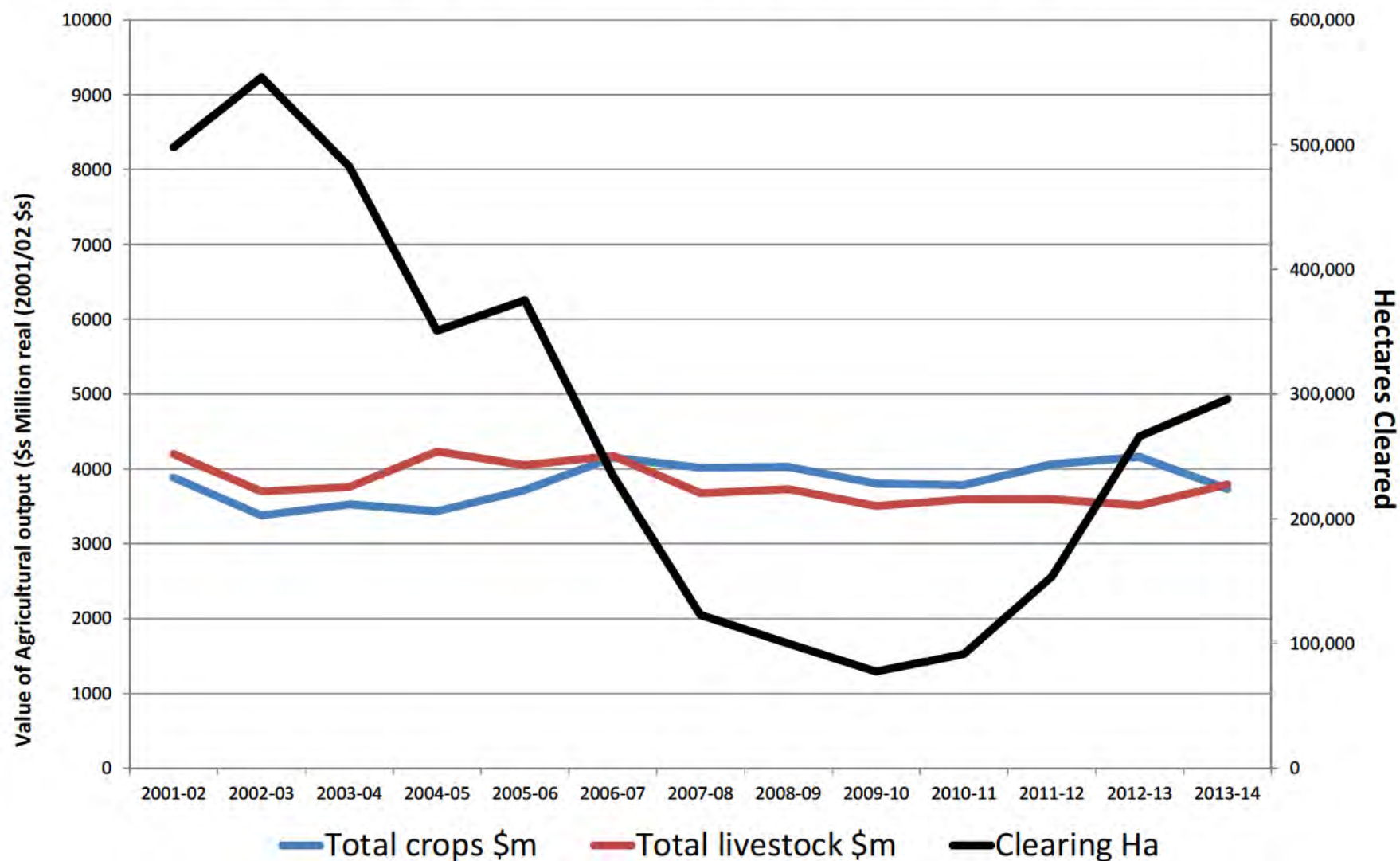
³⁰ <https://youtu.be/V25qDAH40Lw>

<http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/queensland/state-election-2012/newman-defends-environmental-record-20120227-1tyy3.html> <http://mysunshinecoast.com.au/news/news-display/lnp-vegetation-management-plans-a-massive-broken-election-commitment.29423>

³¹ See SLATS Section 4 Statewide assessment of woody vegetation extent and clearing for comments on methodological and comparison issues.

³² SLATS p25.

Land clearing trends and changes in regulation, and agricultural productivity value (real \$s) 2001/02 – 2013/14 Queensland



Sources: ABS Cat. No. 7503.0 - Value of Agricultural Commodities Produced, Australia - Queensland data, various years; ABS Cat. No. 6401.0 Consumer Price Index, Australia - June Quarter, various years; DTSITI/DNRM Queensland SLATS Reports data, various years

- *News laws will reduce farm productivity*

We have looked at the data, and there is no relationship between land clearing controls (as measured by clearing rates) and farm productivity in terms of value of crop and livestock output in Queensland. While there are annual variations in both the real value of cropping output and livestock productivity real values, there are unrelated to land clearing regulations. In fact, it an inverse relationship is apparent in some years!

- *New laws will completely stop farmers from growing food*

This quite ridiculous suggestion has been made several times over the past few months. As the data on farm productivity indicate, clearing has not impacted on overall output.

- *The LNP's laws were really only about fence lines and other minor clearing*

The LNP's changes established a new category for broadscale clearing (high value agriculture), deregulated the protections on high value regrowth and riparian areas, and reduced monitoring and enforcement. The impacts of these changes are to be seen across Queensland, in terms of places like Strathmore and Olive Vale, Great Barrier Reef catchments, and almost zero prosecutions for illegal clearing.

- *High Value Agriculture clearing was about high value cropping*

Under the previous LNP government's changes, there were effectively no rules or meaningful criteria for what constituted so-called high value agriculture. While the term presents the impression that this is about special and valuable crops, it was designed to be a backdoor means of clearing for cattle grazing, as one of those involved in many of the High Value Agriculture applications has since admitted.³³ It is also abundantly clear from the massive clearing at Strathmore under the guise of High Value Agriculture, that there was never any intention to take cropping seriously: why would you fully clear 58,000 hectares in one hit when there is no way this can be cropped on such a scale in any sensible way.

Meanwhile, it has now been claimed that experimental cropping on cleared land at Olive Vale has been a great high value agricultural success³⁴. In fact, the clearing of remnant native woodlands which were home to threatened species, in an area internationally recognised as being of World Heritage value³⁵, and in catchment areas of rivers that flow through world renowned wetlands and drain into the Great Barrier Reef lagoon, has been done to produce nothing more than hay. As well as being a wasteful environmental tragedy in the making, this has also seemingly occurred while the Federal Environment Department is supposed to be assessing the environmental values and impacts of the clearing (given no Federal approval was provided prior to clearing). Thus, this may also be a legal issue which The Wilderness Society is in the process of examining.

³³ See comments from P Spies in <http://www.queenslandcountrylife.com.au/story/3846385/more-to-fear-than-live-export-ban/>

³⁴ <http://www.queenslandcountrylife.com.au/story/3870744/queenslands-northern-most-sorghum-crop-video/>

³⁵ <http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2015/s4229997.htm>

- *No environmental harm has come from LNP's changes*

While it may not yet be possible to quantify the direct and indirect impacts of newly allowed land clearing property by property, the overall effects will include the killing of native animals, including threatened species; the loss of habitats; the degradation of landscapes; the increased risk of erosion, run-off and sedimentation in waterways, wetlands and marine environments; local reductions in rainfall and cloud cover; substantial release of carbon and associated contribution to global warming, climate change and shifting weather patterns including extended droughts and more severe cyclones.

- *Fodder harvesting and Thinning are not a problem*

A recent independent review³⁶ of land clearing Self Assessable Codes (SACs) has highlighted that the codes for Fodder Harvesting and Thinning in particular are problematic in how they are being operated. The Wilderness Society did not support the widespread use of SACs when introduced, and were concerned about their abuse, particularly when applied in the context of weak monitoring and enforcement. Even with boosts in their areas, SACs are adding to the problem of rising clearing rates in Queensland, and require urgent attention and action.

10. Other land clearing reforms The Wilderness Society believes necessary

As noted, the bill does not undo the 2013 changes moving regulation of most permissible clearing from permits to Self-Assessable Codes.

Another area of reform that the Bill is silent on, but which should be considered in the context of regulating the clearing of native woodlands is how regrowing native vegetation that may still be at risk of clearing can be protected through carbon farming initiatives.

It is widely accepted that the current Bill will not be sufficient to fully rein in land clearing in Queensland, nor provide an adequate response to the loss of substantial carbon in trees (and the corresponding opportunities to lock up carbon in trees) in the context of climate change policy. So the Bill is a cautious, conservative step in restoring the pre 2012 position rather than a more comprehensive response to the issues. But it is a start.

At the time of completing this submission, The Wilderness Society notes that the Federal Opposition has announced a climate and energy platform for the Federal election, which includes a proposed trigger under national environmental law to intervene in state land clearing crises. We recognise of course that such a trigger would not have to be invoked in Queensland if sufficient regulation is established, commencing with the passing of the current Bill, and the focus in this state – across conservation, agricultural and landholder sectors - could then shift to how Queensland can retain its remnant native woodland and increase more established native regrowing woodland coverage through a mix of regulation, incentives and land use and climate policy.

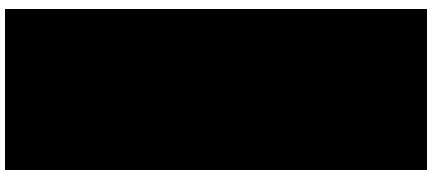
³⁶ <https://www.dnrm.qld.gov.au/our-department/policies-initiatives/vegetation-management/review-sac>

11. Recommendations to the Committee

1. Accept that Queensland has a substantial land clearing problem in 2016 which requires urgent action.
2. Support the passing of *Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016* as an important step in bringing clearing in Queensland back under control.
3. Propose amendment to the Bill to remove s3(1)(h) ('Sustainable land use') from the Purposes of the *Vegetation Management Act 1999*
4. Propose amendment to the Bill to create a new clause to amend the Schedule Dictionary, definition of 'high value regrowth vegetation' within the *Vegetation Management Act 1999*, such that (b) reads "in an area that has not been cleared for the previous 20 years", instead of making reference to "since 31 December 1989".
5. Propose amendment to the Bill to create a new clause which provides the Herbarium and Department of Environment and Heritage Protection with Concurrence Powers in regard to the setting of codes and assessment provisions, and changes to the regulatory map.
6. Propose amendment to the Bill to create a new clause which provides that greenhouse gas emissions be considered as a relevant factor during the assessment of any development applications for land clearing.
7. Urge the Queensland government, and Parliament, to ensure legislative reform is accompanied by regular publishing and updating of regulatory maps and public registers for all clearing under Codes, development approvals and other types.
8. Acknowledge the role that reducing land clearing and increasing woodland coverage can play in reducing carbon emissions, reducing the rate of climate change, and potentially reducing local effects on rainfall and drought.
9. Urge the Queensland government, and Parliament, to support action on trees and carbon through the establishment of a formal taskforce to examine how a combination of regulation, market incentives and Federal/State policy initiatives can be used to support greater protection of woodlands, higher sequestration of carbon in woodlands, and an income stream for landholders through woodland retention regeneration and revegetation.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to comment on the *Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016*. We look forward to further engagement on the development of land clearing legislation and policy, including presenting in person at a Committee hearing. In the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact me should you require any clarification of the responses above or any additional information in that regard.

On behalf of The Wilderness Society:



Dr Tim Seelig
Queensland Campaigns Manager
The Wilderness Society
Brisbane, Queensland



29 April 2016

