

Submission No 18



Dr Martine Maron
Senior Lecturer in Environmental Management
School of Geography, Planning and Environmental Management
The University of Queensland

Brisbane 4072

9 April 2013

Mr David Gibson
Chair, State Development, Infrastructure and Industry Committee

Dear Mr. Gibson,

Re: Vegetation Management Framework Amendment Bill 2013

I write to provide a short submission to the State Development, Infrastructure and Industry Committee regarding the proposed amendments to Queensland's native vegetation management framework. As an ecologist with thirteen years of experience working in Australian woodlands, eight of those in Queensland, I focus my comments on the third of the stated policy objectives of the Amendment Bill, to:

"Maintain protection and management of Queensland's native vegetation resources."

My overall comment on the proposed amendments is that it is not clear the extent to which the changes will maintain the protection of Queensland's native vegetation resources. To the contrary, it appears that the net effect of the changes will be to increase the amount of native vegetation that is cleared each year for development, particularly 'high-value agriculture'. If this is the intention, or indeed a foreseeable outcome, of the Amendment Bill, then it would not appear to be consistent with the stated policy objective.

Until recently Queensland had the second-highest rate of land clearing in the world, and any net rate of loss is by definition unsustainable. It is therefore unclear how 'sustainable land use' can be achieved in the context of ongoing net loss of native vegetation.

In particular, the research group to which I belong has been involved in research into the value of regrowth vegetation for fauna for about ten years, and we have demonstrated that regrowth vegetation is important habitat for many species of birds, mammals and reptiles. The threatened woma python *Aspidites ramsayi* and painted honeyeater *Grantiella picta* are among the many species for which regrowth vegetation is important habitat. The habitat value of brigalow *Acacia harpophylla* regrowth for birds is close to that of remnant vegetation after 30 years. Removing the protection of high-value regrowth therefore increases the level of threat to many species of wildlife. I attach a booklet that summarises some of our group's research.

I strongly urge consideration of a more strategic approach to any removal of native vegetation that is considered unavoidable. This should involve setting clear objectives and targets for the extent of native vegetation of different types to be retained in each bioregion, assessing the environmental costs of vegetation removal, and developing a plan for dealing with any costs considered

unacceptable. Much environmental damage is caused by many small losses of vegetation and habitat, and so a strategic approach is essential. While the changes outlined in the Amendment Bill are targeted and strategic from the perspective of the industries they are intended to benefit, they appear entirely untargeted and non-strategic from the perspective of the environmental assets they are likely to affect. Simply loosening environmental regulations in an untargeted way is very likely to entail unforeseen and undesirable environmental outcomes.

I would be more than happy to provide additional information on our research findings in person or in writing should the SDIIC wish. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this brief submission.

Sincerely,

Dr Martine Maron