



Australian Government
Great Barrier Reef
Marine Park Authority

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STATE DEVELOPMENT, INFRASTRUCTURE
AND INDUSTRY COMMITTEE

State Development, Infrastructure and Industry Committee
Parliament House
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Sir / Madam

**Submission to the State Development, Infrastructure and Industry Committee on the
*Vegetation Management Framework Amendment Bill 2013***

With reference to the *Vegetation Management Framework Amendment Bill 2013* (the Bill), a key issue that needs to be considered is how it maintains and improves protection of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, especially with respect to minimising the effects of climate change, declining water quality and coastal development.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority is supportive of any improvements in the streamlining of regulatory processes. The challenge is to ensure that the management of vegetation resources leads to maintenance of or improvement in water quality, ecosystem services, ecosystem functioning and habitats that support the biodiversity, health and resilience of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

The decline in water quality and the impact on the health of the Great Barrier Reef's ecosystems are widely recognised. Since 2003, the Australian and Queensland Governments have worked in collaboration under the Great Barrier Reef Water Quality Protection Plan (Reef Plan) to improve the quality of water in the Great Barrier Reef through improved land management. In 2008, a taskforce of scientists reviewed the present knowledge of Queensland's land management tools and in their report made a number of statements of evidence that the protection and management of vegetation in Queensland supports Reef Plan's goal:

"Whilst vegetation management through maintenance or rehabilitation of vegetated areas is considered to be a beneficial practice for water quality outcomes, direct measurements of long term outcomes are difficult to find. However, vegetation management in Queensland is probably one of the few examples of documented evidence of the effectiveness of a management action in Queensland through introduction of the Vegetation Management Act in 1999. The legislation restricted the amount of tree clearing that could be undertaken on freehold and leasehold land. Figures from the Statewide Landcover and Trees Study (SLATS) showed the statewide average annual rate for clearing of woody vegetation in 2004/05 was 351,000 hectares. This is 27% lower than in 2003/04 (482,000 ha) and 54% lower than the peak measured clearing rate in 1999/2000 (758,000 ha). Reductions in clearing of more environmentally significant remnant woody vegetation are even greater – 35%, down from 267,000 ha in 2003/04 to 172,000 ha in 2004/05 (Department of Natural Resources and Water, 2007). These figures demonstrate the effectiveness of the introduction of the legislation and in the short term, assumptions are made about the outcomes in terms of water quality and biodiversity values."

These statements show the clear link between effective vegetation management and water quality in the Great Barrier Reef. Further the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's Outlook Report stated that:

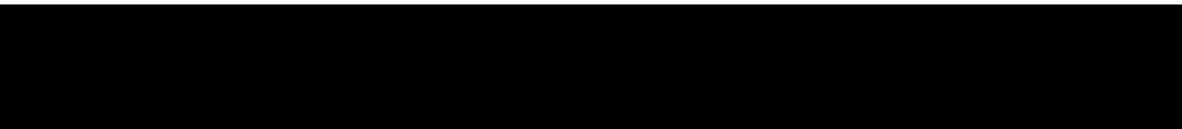
"Sediment inflow into the Great Barrier Reef has increased as a result of extensive forest clearing, especially lowland rainforest and wetlands, for sugar cane and the clearing of dry land forest for grazing. The latter creates sheet erosion where the nutrient rich uppermost layer of soil is washed into rivers during heavy rain, a phenomenon exacerbated by the introduction of drought resistant breeds of cattle capable of heavily grazing of grassland during the dry season" (p 107).
"Increased sediments cause damage to the ecosystem by reducing light penetration, smothering coral and other small invertebrates and transporting nutrients and pesticides to the Great Barrier Reef" (p 109).

Recently the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, in its Submission to Queensland's Parliamentary Committee Inquiry into Agricultural and Resource Industry Regulation in September 2012, noted that "today's legislative environment does not allow for the ill-considered and broadscale changes to the natural environment seen in the 1900s and many of these legacy issues can be addressed".

In its most recent report, *Informing the Outlook for Great Barrier Reef Coastal Ecosystems 2012*, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority clearly stated that "the implementation of the *Vegetation Management Act 1999* dramatically reduced the amount of broadscale clearing in Queensland, falling from the peak of 750,000 hectares per year in 1999–2000 to 123,000 hectares per year in 2007–08. It also provides for increased protection and regrowth of native vegetation, especially around wetland and rivers systems. The Wetland Regulatory Provisions are a significant legislative action aimed at achieving the government's outcomes for Great Barrier Reef water quality improvements and protection of its critical coastal ecosystems".

The first Reef Plan Report Card, published in 2011, identified how important this is to the Great Barrier Reef, showing that historically wetland loss in many coastal areas had been significant, as high as 80%. The improved legislative management under the *Vegetation Management Act* has seen significant improvement such that from 2001 to 2005 the loss of wetlands and their associated riparian areas was reduced to 883 hectares or 0.12% of the pre European settlement extent for wetlands across the Great Barrier Reef's catchment. This means Queensland present management is progressing towards Reef Plan's target of no new loss of wetlands.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's expectation is that any changes to vegetation management in the Great Barrier Reef catchment proposed by this Bill will be aimed at maintaining and improving the gains in reducing the sediment and nutrient loads as well as the potential for improved water quality, biodiversity and ecosystem connectivity that support the health and resilience of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.



Yours sincerely

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Environment and Sustainability

10 April 2013