

Rebecca Ann Smith
Townsville and Region Environment
Foundation
62A Perroux Street 4817
[REDACTED]

Committee Secretary
State Development, Natural Resources
and Agricultural Industry Development Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000
Email: sdnraidc@parliament.qld.gov.au

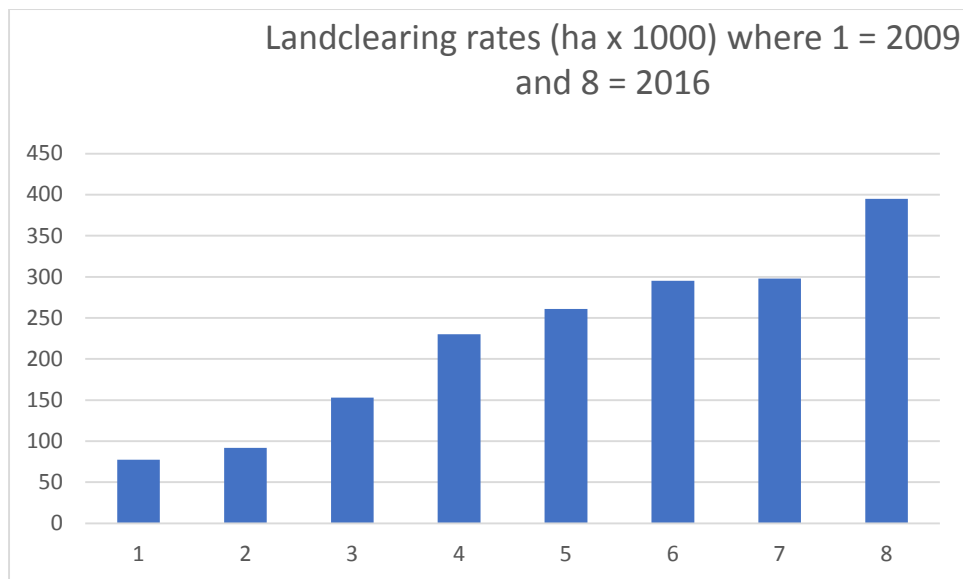
Dear State Development, Natural Resources and Agricultural Industry Development Committee

Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018

Since the passing of Campbell Newman and Andrew Cripps' 2012 amendments to the Vegetation Management Act, broadscale bulldozing of woodland and forest has skyrocketed in Queensland. Previously laws allowed for approximately 62,000 ha of woodlands to be cleared every year, and since the amendments and moratorium on prosecuting offenders, rates of clearing have soared to 400,000 ha per annum.

This figure equates to about 45 million native animals killed every year due to landclearing. The Newman laws permitted bulldozing of forest and regrowth (sometimes areas that were cleared decades ago but now have high biodiversity) for 'high quality agriculture'. Late last year I wrote a submission on a proposal to bulldoze 1400 ha of woodlands in northern Queensland for 'high value agriculture'. This 1400 ha stand of woodlands was home to endangered quolls, vulnerable koalas and other iconic threatened species. This form of agriculture is not defined and I imagined perhaps the land-holders were clearing for avocado plantations – reading on, I discovered that **cattle fodder** has been deemed 'high value agriculture'! Cattle fodder is deemed high value agriculture, and of the hundreds of thousands of hectares of woodlands and forest bulldozed every year, leaked reports to the ABC showed 95% of all clearing was for cattle grazing.

The figure below shows the escalation in land clearing in Queensland, where 75,000 ha were cleared in 2009 (1 on the x axis), to 395,000 ha in 2016 (8 on x axis). Land owners put in to clear a further 1 million ha in 2017, and figures in the Guardian suggest 780,000 of woodlands and all the birdlife and animals bulldozed in 2017. I am awaiting confirmation of that figure.

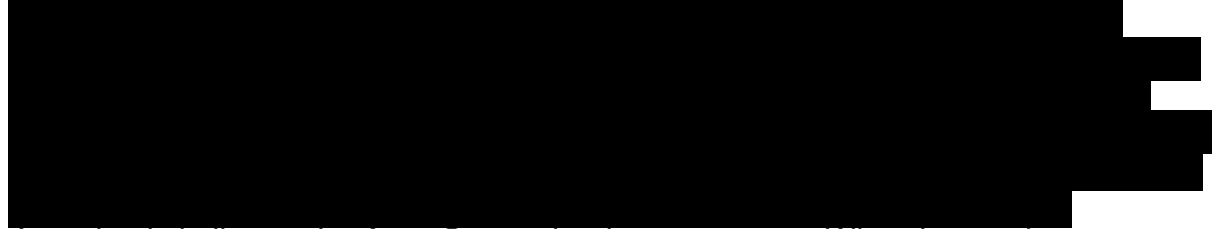


At any rate, 400,000 ha is the same size as 400,000 international rugby league fields, 7692 football fields a week and 1099 football fields' worth of forest, woodland and all the wildlife bulldozed and killed each day. In another perspective, this is 46 rugby league sized tracts of bush destroyed every day, almost solely for people to put cattle on or feed cattle. We have finite bush in this state, and the clearing is cumulative.

In the year 2016, over 120,000 ha of forest and woodlands cleared was in the Great Barrier Reef catchment. Run-off from and clearing is responsible for sedimentation of sea-grass meadows – essential food of endangered marine turtles and critically endangered (in the Great Barrier Reef) dugongs. I might add that dugong numbers have plummeted 60% from the 2009 Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority Outlook Report and the 2014 Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority Outlook Report, and these gentle mammals are now considered critically endangered in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. The presence of migratory dugongs was one of the four criteria that resulted in the Great Barrier Reef being prescribed on the World Heritage Register. By allowing plumes of sedimentation to smother sea-grasses, the government is putting dugongs and the World Heritage Listing at risk.

Most nitrogen that enters the Great Barrier Reef lagoon is particulate nitrogen, from land clearing and pastoral practices. The Outlook Report finds the worst catchments for poor water quality are the Fitzroy and Burdekin catchments, whose overwhelming land use activity is grazing. These agricultural pursuits are the primary cause of the very poor water quality in the southern Great Barrier Reef, south of Cooktown. The major drivers of water quality decline are catchment sediment loads, particulate nitrogen and particulate phosphorus. Coral destroying Crown of Thorns starfish larvae have very high survival rates where nitrogen and phosphorus loads (particulate is from land clearing) and have been shown to explode after high land clearing events followed by flooding. Land-clearing is killing the Reef. High sediment and nutrient loads from land clearing allow coral smothering macro-algae to flourish, putting further strain on the Reef ecosystem.

As touched upon above, land clearing causes an Armageddon to native wildlife. Koalas and other rapidly diminishing species die when their homes are bulldozed and then logs they find refuge in are burned. Ecologists estimate 45 million native animals are killed through land clearing. Many of these are listed threatened species, but self-assessable nature of current laws mean many threatened species are killed.



Anecdotal similar stories from Queensland are common. When I moved to Queensland in 1987, brigalow woodland were common – these are now endangered ecosystems.

I support the Bill's scrapping of the thinning code – I have heard farmers describe what is euphemistically described as 'thinning' using the Joh Bjelke-Petersen two bulldozer invention, and have seen satellite photos of the same. This euphemism is dishonest and destructive. The Bill lacks tightening up fodder harvesting provisions, and no restrictions on clearing during drought declarations. I am dismayed that the reverse onus of proof has been scrapped – the new provisions allow environmental vandals to bask in silence, while the Crown has to prove their guilt. Given the extreme rates of landclearing in recent years, one can surmise that farmers are *not* the environmentally considerate people they claim to be, but opportunists taking any opportunity presenting itself.

Remnant clearing must be stopped. Koala numbers have dropped 75% in south east Queensland, and we don't seem to be concerned about any other species. Australia has the unenviable record as highest rate of extinctions in the world, and Queensland open-slather land clearing laws are helping us up on the number one podium.

Please toughen land-clearing laws. Australian fauna and flora belongs to all of us, and should not be pushed to extinction for overseas demand for beef.

Yours sincerely

Rebecca Smith BSc-LLB, LLM, M. Invest.

Townsville and Region Environment Foundation (TREF)