



22 March 2018

Committee Secretary
State Development, Natural Resources
and Agricultural Industry Development Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

To whom it may concern,

Re: Submission by the Mary River Catchment Coordination Association to the Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018.

The Mary River Catchment Coordination Association is a very active non profit Integrated Catchment Management organisation overseen by the Mary River Catchment Coordinating Committee (MRCCC), made up of interest sector representatives from 25 industry, community and government sectors with interests in sustainable natural resource management. The group was incorporated on the 17th March 1995 and today, collectively, reaches out to thousands of catchment residents through our stakeholder Delegates and associated networks throughout the Mary Catchment, which encompasses an area of 10,000 km². The Mary River headwaters are located near Maleny. The river flows northwards for 320 km, entering the Great Sandy Strait near Hervey Bay.

In 1996, the MRCCC's non regulatory and cooperative approach facilitated the development of the Mary Catchment Strategy, which outlined a suite of actions to improve catchment health. The Mary River and Tributaries Rehabilitation Implementation Plan was subsequently published in 2002, prioritising river and stream reaches for rehabilitation investment. These documents outline a 50 year strategic vision and planning framework for creating a sustainable and productive future for the catchment and were developed in active partnership with the Queensland Government, local communities and industry.

Over the past 20 years, the MRCCC has successfully developed and implemented projects for a range of organisations including the Federal Government Departments of Agriculture and Environment, local government across the Wide Bay and Sunshine Coast regions, State Government including the Department of Main Roads, and regional organisations.

Background.

The MRCCC made a submission to the introduction of the VMOLA Bill under the previous term of government and was asked to make an oral presentation to the Committee in Gympie. From recollection, our presentation was the second of four and was followed by many statements from the floor. Three things became particularly evident during those statements. The first was a palpable sense of hostility. The second was that many of the assertions made from the floor were inaccurate representations of the impacts of the proposed legislation. The third was that the local member seemed equally confused by the impacts of the proposed legislation, possibly, as a result of information provided to him by his constituents. It became very apparent that the community were very ill-informed on the impacts of the proposed changes.

*The MRCCC gratefully acknowledges the support of
The Sunshine Coast Regional Council, Noosa Council and Gympie Regional Council,
the Australian Government Department of Environment, the Burnett Mary Regional Group, the Queensland Department
of Main Roads, the Department of Science, Information Technology and Innovation,
and landholders throughout the Mary Catchment.*

DONATIONS TO THE MARY CATCHMENT PUBLIC FUND ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE

The MRCCC maintains that the government did not proactively inform the community on the potential impacts of the legislation, and this led to major misunderstanding of the intent of the legislation. It is our position that the government should have done considerably more to inform the wider community about the proposed legislation. The government should have provided an officer very familiar with the foreshadowed legislation, to clarify and comment on many of the assertions made (eg land 50 metres either side of a watercourse will be “locked up”). This briefing would have been appropriate on the night of the hearing or at a previous information session.

Comments

The MRCCC strongly supports the need for robust and consistent legislation on vegetation protection, particularly in riparian zones, not only to ensure the laws are complied with but, more importantly to assist landholders to clarify them and to follow them correctly. In conjunction with this, the MRCCC recognises the need for adequate departmental staff.

We reject the assertion that this legislation is “anti-farmer”. For more than two decades, MRCCC has worked with hundreds of primary producers who have a keen sense of looking after their land and their riparian zones, their greatest asset, and who also recognise that what they do (or fail to do) on their properties impacts on other properties, particularly those downstream. The MRCCC has been able to source funding to help landholders erect riparian fencing, install off-stream watering for stock, establish riparian plantings, control invasive weeds and reduce gully erosion. We recognise that some landholders, farmers or otherwise, take better care of their land than others and we see this legislation as necessary for those who aren’t “doing the right thing”

Recently we made a submission on Gympie Regional Council’s Koala Management Plan. Significant clearing of mature remnant Eucalypts in prime koala habitat in the Gympie region is not for primary production but for future subdivision, whether it be the allotments themselves or for widened roads to service them. We appreciate the increased protection this bill would provide in this situation. Far too often in the past we have been contacted once the trees have been rendered horizontal, a situation we are understandably keen to avoid.

We strongly welcome the fact that this Bill will extend protection to regrowth vegetation in watercourse areas for our area of concern, the Mary River catchment.

Further we welcome the fact that the Bill will also amend the Water Act to re-regulate the removal of vegetation in a watercourse under a Riverine Protection Permit, and more importantly that officers from the government are available to inspect and provide advice to the landholders before the permit is issued.

Whilst we recognise that our earlier comment about the need for more information before this submission phase may help to reduce some hostility, we trust there will be a strong commitment from government that information sessions will be provided in the event of the Bill’s successful passage.

We deeply regret that the Vegetation Management act is used as a political football and look forward to the day when we have vegetation protections that remain consistent from one government to the next, as are, for example, the road rules.

Yours sincerely,



Ian Mackay
Chair
MRCCC