

21/03/2018

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

Dear Committee

**Submission to the Inquiry in *Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018***

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the above Inquiry.

I am a 28 year old environmental activist with a great love for our oceans and the Great Barrier Reef and connections to the union and environmental movement. I live in Brisbane since 1.5 years and am very concerned about the state of the Reef.

The surge in land clearing since the Newman LNP government dramatically weakened the laws has destroyed critical habitat, killed millions of native animals and drastically increased carbon emissions. The impacts on our Great Barrier Reef are sediment pollution and accelerated global warming, causing water temperatures to rise and corals to bleach and die.

Scientists confirmed the 2016 bleaching event was the largest die-off of corals ever recorded on the Great Barrier Reef<sup>1</sup>. It killed at least 22% of the Reef's corals and seriously damaged the region's World Heritage values. In the northern, most pristine part of the Great Barrier Reef, 67% of inshore shallow reefs were killed<sup>2</sup>.

Broadscale tree clearing is accelerating global warming. The SLATS report states that from 2015-16 395,000 hectares of bushland and forests were wiped out in Queensland alone, and over 158,000 hectares of vegetation were bulldozed in the Great Barrier Reef catchment, the latter representing a 45% increase from 2014-15. Our Reef is in a fragile state and will not tolerate the additional risk posed by broadscale tree clearing contributing millions of tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere every year. The extent of tree clearing not only places the future of our natural wonder at risk but also the 64,000 tourism jobs that rely on it.

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<sup>1</sup> GBRMPA Interim Bleaching Report 2016 p.iv

<sup>2</sup> ARC Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies (2016)

<https://www.coralcoe.org.au/media-releases/coral-bleaching-taskforce-documents-most-severe-bleaching-on-record>

The destruction of forests and bushland is also dramatically increasing soil erosion, leading to downstream soil pollution of the creeks and rivers that flow into the Great Barrier Reef. This increase in sediment pollution is smothering inshore reefs, corals and seagrass meadows that are home to threatened turtles and dugongs. The Great Barrier Reef is home to one of the last remaining dugong populations in the world. Poor water quality from sediment pollution and habitat loss are threatening the existence of these much loved species.

The World Heritage obligations must also be taken seriously when the World Heritage Committee has warned that the failure to meet targets from the Reef 2050 plan, including the implementation of adequate vegetation protection laws, could risk the Reef being listed as 'in danger'.

I welcome the improvements that are in this law: the end of permits for so-called High Value Agriculture, the removal of the main self-assessable code for thinning, the modification of the fodder self-assessable code, and the redefinition of High Value Regrowth to include regrowing forest and bushland that is 15 years of age and within 50 metres of watercourses in Great Barrier Reef catchments.

However, these laws must end broadscale clearing and protect all remnant and High Conservation Value regrowth forest and bushland in Queensland. For this, the following improvements to the law must be made:

- Ensure that no threatened species habitat is able to be bulldozed, and no "of concern" regional ecosystems are able to be bulldozed.
- End all bulldozing of mature forest and bushland for 'thinning' (which will still be allowed under a Development Approval, existing Area Management Plans and self-assessable regrowth codes).
- End bulldozing of mature forest and bushland for so-called 'fodder harvesting' unless it is lopping individual branches. At the very least, it should be proven to be necessary due to being a drought, and proven to be 'low ecological impact.'
- Protect all regrowing forest and bushland that is threatened species habitat and that surrounds watercourses (riparian areas)—as was promised in the election commitment.
- Protect the regrown remnant and High Conservation Value Regrowth that is currently marked 'exempt' and is not protected in Category X on PMAVs.

Finally, I am anxious to ensure that with the passing of the Bill, protected vegetation, be it Category B (remnant), Category C (high value regrowth), or Category R (Reef riparian), is fully and properly mapped and protected across Queensland.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to raise these matters. Should you require any further information about this submission, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



Sabine Walther