

21 March 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

Melissa Arancelovic  
Secretary  
Pine Rivers Koala  
Care Association Inc



Dear Committee,

**Submission to Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018 ('VMOLA Bill') inquiry**

I am making this submission as Secretary of Pine Rivers Koala Care Association Inc (PRKCAI), on behalf of our nearly 150 members. Our Association has been dedicated to the rescue, rehabilitation and release of koalas and other native wildlife in the Moreton Bay region since the 1990s. A steady increase in development throughout our area has seen koala and other wildlife numbers decline significantly. This seems to be happening at an increasing rate in recent years, through land clearing for housing developments, the Redcliffe Peninsula Rail Line, and most recently, the Mill Precinct University Project.

PRKCAI has in recent years expanded its' community engagement activities, and we now provide information and education about conservation issues to people in our area, from visiting schools to hosting our own annual 'Wild Koala Day.' The primary aim of this outreach is to raise community awareness of the damage that habitat clearing is doing to our native species.

In our experience, habitat areas do not have anything like a universal value, and protecting them is not considered a priority by certain interests in our community, which is why we strongly support the reintroduction of meaningful land clearing laws in Queensland. In particular, we support:

- **Reintroduction of the requirement to obtain Riverine Protection Permits** to better regulate damaging clearing in watercourses;
- **Phasing out existing Area Management Plans** which have allowed significant clearing under lower regulation across Queensland;
- **Improved protection of 'high value regrowth vegetation'**, being vegetation that has grown back well after being cleared. This is vital to protecting the work that so many of our members do in rehabilitating and re-establishing habitat for the purpose of creating wildlife corridors. Corridors are a crucial element in preserving existing native wildlife by connecting remaining habitat areas with each other. They allow for safe movement from one area to another for koalas and other wildlife. **However, 'high value regrowth vegetation' must be extended to fully meet the government's election commitment by protecting high conservation value regrowth vegetation.** Extra amendments are needed to allow much more extensive protection including endangered vegetation species and communities, locally threatened species habitat and areas where landscape integrity is at risk.<sup>1</sup>
- **Tightening of the definition of 'thinning' (now known as 'managing thickened vegetation') is supported.** The Bill now requires that thinning activities must 'maintain ecological processes and prevent loss of diversity'. To ensure this definition is given effect there must be a requirement that

<sup>1</sup> Queensland Labor, 2017 'Saving Habitat, Protecting Wildlife and Restoring Land' Policy Document, <https://www.queenslandlabor.org/media/20226/alpa-saving-habitat-policy-document-v3.pdf>

it be demonstrated prior to clearing being allowed. **However, to truly reduce the significant clearing allowed for 'thinning' it should no longer be an allowable activity by permit or code, particularly not for mature and high value regrowth vegetation and under existing Area Management Plans.** 'Thinning' can include clearing up to 75% of a forest under current laws and has been responsible for significant clearing across Queensland without scientific justification that this is a necessary activity at all.

Notwithstanding the above support, we are disappointed that the Bill includes provisions that could be used to allow new self-assessable codes (Clause 4 of the Bill), create new Area Management Plans (Clause 14 of the Bill), delay the removal of existing Area Management Plans for up to two years (Clause 14 of the Bill). And see reverting protected woodlands to unprotected Category X (Clause 13 of the Bill).

We are also disappointed that government is not proposing to substantially tighten up fodder harvesting provisions, including major restrictions and tying any clearing to official drought declaration.

We wish to see the Bill and associated policies strengthened to address each of these deficiencies, and respectfully ask that the Committee examine options for recommending changes to the Bill and codes accordingly.

While not a specific focus for this Bill, we look forward to additional specific action under the Planning Act to better protect threatened species habitats in key areas of Queensland, including koalas and their habitats in the Moreton Bay region.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to raise these matters. Please contact me if you think we would be able to assist with your Inquiry in any other way, or if you require any further information about this submission.

Kind regards,

Melissa Arancelovic

Secretary

Pine Rivers Koala Care Association Inc.