



Cairns and Far North Environment Centre Inc.

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

Via Email: [sdnraidc@parliament.qld.gov.au](mailto:sdnraidc@parliament.qld.gov.au)

22 March 2018

Dear Committee,

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

The Cairns and Far North Environment Centre (CAFNEC) is the regional peak environment group advocating for the protection of the Far North Queensland's (FNQ) natural environment.

Formed in 1981 by local conservation groups, CAFNEC has for more than 35 years sought to raise the profile of the environmental values and issues in the region from Cardwell north to the Torres Straits including both the Wet Tropics and Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Areas.

Our members are community members and local conservation groups that amongst many other issues, work on habitat and waterway restoration, reef and waterway water quality, wildlife rescue and championing climate action.

The contradictory nature of the Queensland government's initiatives is not lost on our community. While volunteers spend countless hours planting trees, restoring waterways, rescuing wildlife and raising awareness of climate change impacts and solutions, often with government grants, we know that other government policies are undermining our efforts. As we plant trees, clean up waterways and support initiatives that keep carbon in the ground, in just one year 2015-16, an area equivalent in size to 10 towns the size of Cairns (approximately) have been cleared in Reef catchments.

FNQ has drawn focus with high profile incidents of land clearing including, Olive Vale, Strathmore, Integrated Food and Energy Developments (IFED), Barnwell (proposed site of KURworld), Wombinoo, Springvale, Bauxite mining on the Cape and many examples of urban land clearing, particularly in Cairns that are resulting in impacts on wildlife and water quality.

FNQ has also been the epicentre of climate change impacts, most notoriously the catastrophic bleaching of the central and northern sections of the Great Barrier Reef. But



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climate change is affecting our region in many other ways. We've seen the unprecedented die-back of mangroves in the Gulf, and anecdotally-reported increase in intensity of cyclones, drought and fire and increasingly the proliferation of invasive species, all of which not only impact our environment but also the communities whose livelihoods are affected. The traditional industries of FNQ, agriculture, fisheries and tourism, are all under pressure.

CAFNEC supports a number of the proposed amendments but recommend further strengthening in some areas particularly in relation to high value regrowth and riparian zone protections. The proposed amendments contain key gaps that would leave significant areas of Queensland unregulated. Bringing these areas back under regulation is necessary to ensure the Queensland government increases its ability to manage the cumulative and consequential impacts of land clearing, especially in the context of climate change.

**The following elements of the VMOLA Bill are strongly supported by CAFNEC as they are necessary to reduce excessive clearing in Queensland:**

1. Removal of the ability to obtain permits for high value agriculture and high value irrigated agriculture. The Statewide Landcover and Trees Study found that 10% of mature bushland clearing from 2013-2016 happened under these permit types, with generally insufficient verification that the land was high value agricultural land, was needed for agriculture, and was actually utilised for the agricultural activity applied for; (see clause 16)
2. Reintroduction of the requirement to obtain Riverine Protection Permits to better regulate damaging clearing in watercourses (see clauses 51 and 52);
3. Phasing out existing Area Management Plans which have allowed significant clearing under lower regulation across Queensland; (see clause 14)
4. Extended protections of regrowth vegetation near watercourses across Great Barrier Reef catchments, to reduce damaging runoff, including Eastern Cape York, Fitzroy and Burnett-Mary catchments which were not protected under the VM Act currently. (see clauses 133 and 38)



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**CAFNEC generally supports the following amendments, however it is essential that they are strengthened by the following proposed amendments to truly reduce excessive clearing of wildlife habitat, impacts to the Great Barrier Reef and climate change emissions:**

1. Improved protected of 'high value regrowth vegetation', being vegetation that has grown back well after being cleared. The Bill creates a broader definition, including vegetation that hasn't been cleared for 15 years and re-extending regulation to freehold, indigenous land and occupational licences (see clause 38). This is supported.
2. 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, vegetation in reef catchments, riparian areas, threatened species habitat and areas where landscape integrity is at risk.
3. 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 it be demonstrated prior to clearing being allowed. (See clauses 4 and 38)
4. 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.
5. The Bill clarifies that landholders may seek to amend their property map of assessable vegetation (PMAV) to re-regulate clearing in areas which were locked in across Queensland as not needing assessment under Newman Government laws. This clarification is supported as helpful.
6. However, the Bill needs to be changed to require amendment of maps that lock in unregulated clearing of all high value vegetation. Under the Newman Government, significant areas of Queensland were locked in under property level maps which allowed the clearing of unregulated 'category X' even though the clearing would



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impact mature, high value vegetation. Leaving map amendment up to the land owner will leave significant areas of Queensland where clearing is unregulated.

7. The Bill does not tighten excessive clearing allowed under fodder harvesting codes so amendments are needed. Fodder harvesting should be limited to where there is an official drought declaration.

I would like to appear before the Committee, on behalf of CAFNEC, in their hearing for this inquiry and have registered interest via email.

Sincerely,

Roz Walden  
CAFNEC Director

As Director of CAFNEC, I am authorised to make a submission on behalf of the organisation.