



**CAPRICORN
CONSERVATION
COUNCIL INC.**
ABN 14 846 165 788

A voice for the environment

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

Dear Committee,

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

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the above Inquiry. This submission is made on behalf of Capricorn Conservation Council, Rockhampton, Queensland.

Since 1973 Capricorn Conservation Council (CCC) has performed an important role in providing community conservation education. Our work is mainly through volunteers and our engagement covers schools, general community, industry and government. CCC participates in numerous community, government and industry forums, a small sample includes:

- Environment and Heritage Protection Ministerial Roundtable
- Central Queensland Mine Rehabilitation Group
- Shoalwater Bay Training Area Environmental Advisory Committee
- Fitzroy Water Quality Advisory Group (EHP/DNRM)
- Fitzroy Partnership for River Health
- Project and EIS panels and consultative meetings and reports for coal, coal seam gas projects, dam and weirs proposals, statutory plans and water quality guidelines.

Queensland has witnessed a surge in land clearing since laws and policies were seriously weakened by the Newman LNP government. Land clearing is the main cause of biodiversity loss, resulting in tens of millions of native animals being killed every year and countless habitats destroyed. Land clearing exacerbates erosion and salinity, reduces water quality, worsens the impacts of drought, and contributes significantly to carbon emissions.

In 2016 the '*Scientists' Declaration: Accelerating Forest, Woodland and Grassland Destruction in Australia*' was issued by over 400 scientists, including some of Australia's leading conservation scientists, they informed us all of the impacts land clearing is having on Australia's biodiversity.²

Here in Central Queensland (CQ), the Brigalow Belt bioregion is a landscape fragmented by land clearing, where the highest densities of terrestrial threatened flora habitat are found and with 80 to 100% of freshwater and terrestrial fauna species at risk of habitat loss.³

A clear example of this is the is the Endangered (State & Commonwealth) Bridled Nailtail Wallaby, *Onychogalea fraenata*. The clearing of 5,700,000 hectares of brigalow and softwood scrubs reduced their preferred habitat area by around 95% with a total population count of approximately 100 wallabies' remaining in the remnant brigalow scrubs of Taunton National Park, CQ.⁴

Another example is Queensland's most endangered mammal, the Northern Hairy-nosed Wombat, *Lasiiorhinus krefftii*. There are only 138 individuals left, living at Epping Forest National Park near Clermont, CQ. Land clearing has severely reduced their suitable habitat.⁵

The following elements of the VMOLA Bill are strongly supported as they are a step in the right direction to help reduce excessive clearing in Queensland:

1. **The phase out of existing Area Management Plans** which has allowed significant clearing under lower regulation across Queensland; (*see clause 14*)
2. **Removing of the ability to obtain permits for high value agriculture and high value irrigated agriculture.** The State-wide Landcover and Trees Study found that 10% of mature bushland clearing from 2013-2016 happened under these permit types, generally with 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*)
3. **Reintroduction of the requirement to obtain Riverine Protection Permits** to better regulate damaging clearing in watercourses (*see clauses 51 and 52*);
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*)

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

5. **Improved protected of 'high value regrowth vegetation'**, 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.**
6. **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.¹
7. **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)**

8. **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.
9. **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.
10. **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 impact mature, high value vegetation. Leaving map amendment up to the land owner will leave significant areas of Queensland where clearing is unregulated.
11. **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.

Finally, we are 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.

It is now time to ensure our native wildlife and the native woodlands they rely on for their habitats, and the iconic Great Barrier Reef is supported with better protection. Over time, the community needs to see reforms that lead to land clearing rates falling significantly.

We respectfully ask that the Committee examine options for recommending changes to the Bill and codes accordingly, and to ensure that the above reforms are fully translated into practice.

Even with these reforms, we believe there is more work to be done in bringing about an end to remnant clearing in Queensland, to better protect threatened species and their habitats, and to effectively protect native woodlands.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to raise these matters. We welcome any invitation to appear in front of the Committee or to assist your Inquiry in any other way. Should you require any further information about this submission, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely



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

2 Ecological Society of Australia, 2016 'Scientists' Declaration: Accelerating Forest, Woodland and Grassland Destruction in Australia', <https://www.ecolsoc.org.au/files/files/Scientist's%20Declaration%20on%20Land%20Clearing.docx>

3 Queensland Government, Department of Science, Information Technology and Innovation, '*Scientific review of the impacts of land clearing on threatened species in Queensland*'.

4 Queensland Museum, 2018, 'Bridled Nailtail Wallaby', Website, <http://www.qm.qld.gov.au/Find+out+about/Animals+of+Queensland/Mammals/Queenslands+vanishing+wildlife/Bridled+Nailtail+Wallaby#.WrHGHqiuyUk>

5 Queensland Museum, 2018, 'Northern Hairy-nosed Wombat', Website, <http://www.qm.qld.gov.au/Find+out+about/Animals+of+Queensland/Mammals/Queenslands+vanishing+wildlife/Northern+Hairy-nosed+Wombat#.WrHGIKiuyUk>