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

Magnetic Island Nature Care Association (MINCA) is an incorporated voluntary conservation group established with the objects of supporting and encouraging the protection and sustainable use of Magnetic Island and its associated region.

MINCA opposed the changes by the Newman government to the VMA and has watched in horror the steadily increasing extent of broad-scale clearing in Queensland. We are pleased to see the State Government is finally in a position to reverse the shortsighted policies of the Newman government. We know that the previous VMA and associated acts, regulations and policies were the result of many years of broad consultation and development, and were potentially effective tools for the protection and management of Queensland vegetation, landscape and biodiversity values.

MINCA strongly supports the proposed amendments, and in particular the transitional arrangements to ensure that inappropriate clearing does not undermine the intent of the amendments while they are being further considered.

The controls the proposed legislation will re-instate are essential for the future wellbeing of the Queensland environment, its economy, and its people. They will ensure that once again we become responsible citizens of Australia, and of the global community.

Global environmental change must be addressed urgently, at all scales and in all ways possible. The legislative changes proposed are a sound basis for the protection of the ecological elements and processes that underpin regional environments, and ultimately underpin global environmental health. This includes the protection of ecological communities, and of the processes that

protect and maintain water cycles, soil stability, nutrient cycling and associated biological diversity.

The amendments will help ensure that regional land uses can be sustainable, and that Queensland is part of global responses to reduce the degree and impact of climate change. The amendments will ensure a reduction in CO₂ emissions, an increase in carbon sequestration, a reduction in the increasing stresses being placed on the natural environment through overdevelopment and use, and the amelioration of local climates through the retention of adequate shade and soil cover in a time of increasing heat stress.

In particular MINCA supports amendments to the Vegetation Management Act 1999 to:

Remove the provisions to clear for high value agriculture and high value irrigation, and to extend the protection of high conservation value regrowth vegetation on leasehold, freehold and Indigenous land

Many parts of Queensland have been overdeveloped and the protection of significant regrowth is the most effective way to reduce further degradation and minimize downstream impacts. The most productive land has already been largely cleared and viable remnants will only be retained if further clearing is prevented and significant regrowth carefully nurtured.

It must be said that most Not of Concern ecosystems have not been developed due to their low capability and should not be available for broadscale clearing. Such clearing will inevitably lead to long-term land degradation. The continuing use of a regional ecosystems "Conservation Status" as the major determinant of clearing under the VMA undermines this. The susceptibility of an ecosystem to long term decline after clearing, due to poor soil structure, low fertility, salinity hazard and other susceptibilities should also be a significant factor in assessing applications to clear, and regrowth assessments.

Establish transitional provisions to discourage "panic" clearing, and of "panic" applications to declare Category X areas through the PMAV process.

Such amendments are strongly supported. Any further clearing in Queensland from now should be minimal and only after careful consideration. The proposed amendments will assist this by discouraging unauthorised clearing.

Amendment to include the additional GBR catchments Burnett-Mary, Eastern Cape York and the Fitzroy in the protection of regrowth vegetation.

These catchments all have the potential to impact on the GBR and require particular care and attention. As mentioned above, the degradation potential of regrowth areas should also be considered, not just the riverbanks.

MINCA also supports the consequential amendments to the other associated legislation. In particular we strongly support a requirement for the restoration of areas cleared without proper approval within the

transitional period, and the increased protection given to watercourses, lakes and springs. The criteria proposed for the assessment of these areas through Section 220 of the Water Act are also fully supported.

MINCA believes insufficient information has been provided to not reinstate the responsibility to the landholder for unauthorized clearing.

In the absence of this information MINCA strongly supports the arguments presented in the explanatory notes to the 2016 Amendment Bill that the reverse onus of proof offence provision be reinstated.

MINCA also supports further amendments to the VMA to address the following issues:

Broadscale clearing of Mulga (*Acacia aneura*) for fodder is and should be treated as broadscale clearing.

Mulga is cleared for fodder when the natural pastures have been grazed out and the ground is bare. In other words Mulga is cleared when degradation is already severe. To further compound this degradation by largely unregulated broadscale clearing is both irresponsible and illogical and is a devastating short-term response to a long-term problem. With climate change and increasing heat and moisture stress, tree cover will become increasingly significant in soil and landscape protection. Destocking and property build up to enable long term restoration is the only sustainable response to the history of overgrazing in the Mulga Lands and should be supported by the state government. "Fodder" clearing should be stopped entirely.

The use of the "endangered" and "of concern" categories as a principal criteria in deciding applications to clear enables the piecemeal disturbance or development of essentially undeveloped landscapes. A landscape scale assessment and response is needed to ensure the outstanding natural values of these undeveloped landscapes are maintained.

Undeveloped landscapes dominate the northern bioregions of the state, including Cape York, the Einasleigh Uplands, the Gulf Plains, the North West Highlands and the Desert Uplands. Undisturbed savanna landscapes such as these are now of world significance and Australia has the largest remaining areas. Their protection should be a state and national priority. In Queensland, and across northern Australia, they are under threat as the push to develop the north develops in response to increasing droughts in southern Australia and increasing markets for food to our north. The legislation should ensure that land use remains at a sustainable level, and that natural values are not lost through incremental and un-coordinated development.

This could be achieved by the decisive use of Declared Areas under section 19F of the VMA, bolstered by amendments that prohibit incremental change in intact landscapes. To our knowledge this provision has never been used, although this neglect ultimately undermines the capacity of the Act to meet its objectives.

The State Government prior to the Newman Government was well advanced in the identification of statewide and regional corridors to provide a framework for tree retention, regrowth management and tree planting. The Department of Environment and Science currently has the information to identify areas of HCV for refugia etc through its Biodiversity Planning Assessments. If the State Government is truly committed to establishing sustainable patterns of landscape protection and management then a planning framework is needed so that 19F can be properly implemented.

The VMA should be further amended to **require** a statewide framework of declared areas and corridors.

Grassland regional ecosystems should be regulated

Of all the savanna landscapes, grasslands are the most threatened because they can be “cleared” by the plough. In the Brigalow Belt the unregulated ploughing of grasslands has inevitably led to their destruction to the extent that they are now Endangered, and the Federal Government has had to intervene in their protection.

The Queensland Government should accept its responsibility for the sustainable use of grassland ecosystems and the VMA is the most suitable existing legislation to achieve this.

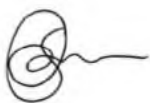
This submission has the full support of the Executive Committee of MINCA. It has been made on the basis of materials accessed via the committee’s website, and on the basis of my personal involvement in

- the development of the previous clearing controls between 1992 and 2011
- the development and implementation of the regional ecosystem and mapping framework that underpins the VMA (between 1989 and 2011), and
- the assessment and planning for sustainable land use and biodiversity conservation across Queensland, and particularly in the north, between 1975 and 2011.

Thank you for the opportunity for making this submission. MINCA commends the State Government for finally acting to redress the environmental irresponsibility of the Newman government.

Should you require further information on any particular aspect of this submission please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Gethin Morgan
President.
Magnetic Island Nature Care.