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

Cooloola Coastcare Association Inc (CCAI) is a non-government natural resource management organization whose objective is to protect and preserve the coastal and marine environment from Double Island Point to River Heads in the Ramsar-listed Great Sandy Straits. We won the 2017 State Landcare Award (Coastcare section) in recognition of our work over the past 20 years. We have conducted a wide range of natural resource management projects including water quality testing and seagrass monitoring.

In our Cooloola Underwater Biodiversity Project, we mapped the flora and fauna of the benthic zone in Tin Can Inlet (see <https://www.underseaproductions.com/blog/tin-can-bay-marine-biodiversity-assessment-4k-underwater-video-diving/>). We found disturbingly high amounts of sedimentation from stormwater run-off and soil disturbance through poor vegetation management practices by various land managers, including over-clearing of riparian zones in the Mary River catchment by farming and forestry businesses.

As we are located at the southern gateway to the Great Barrier Reef, we are aware of the negative impact that poor vegetation clearing and land management practices have on the iconic marine qualities of the area. We therefore applaud your government for re-introducing protections and implore you to strengthen them further by consideration of marine couch as vegetation requiring a management plan.

We work toward scientific justification that marine couch is a viable and sustainable pasture; it does not seem to fit the 3P criteria (palatable, productive, perennial) of Best Management Practice; and given the widespread impact of pugging on

saltmarsh, salt flats and coastal wetlands, along the Queensland coast from Brisbane to the Gulf of Carpentaria, this vegetation (along with casuarina glauca) requires strengthened protection for water quality and the ecosystem it inhabits.

The following elements of the VMOLA Bill are strongly supported as they are a step to help 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)**

We generally support 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:

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.<sup>1</sup>
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

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

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 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.

We offer you our gratitude and support for strengthening these protections.

Yours sincerely

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