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21st 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

Veteran Tree Group Australia (Ltd) are a not for profit community group concerned primarily with the conservation and preservation of older, veteran and other significant trees. The group's primary aims are to raise awareness of the importance of veteran trees and provide advice to the community on best practice management. Our interest in the VMOLA Bill extends to the management and conservation of native remnant and regrowth vegetation which is critical to ensuring the preservation of older native trees and the essential habitat that they provide. We offer this submission for your consideration since the trees that we are seeking to protect are irreplaceable and of global importance.

A wealth of research has shown that there is a worldwide critical shortage of large old hollow bearing trees. Trees with hollows provide critical habitat for more than 60% of Australian mammal species, and older trees provide niche habitat for numerous other vertebrate and invertebrate species shown to be important at the single tree level. Protection of all remaining old growth forest ecosystems is essential. However, it has also been demonstrated that the ecosystem functions of isolated individual urban, paddock and other native hollow bearing trees in degraded remnants and roadside verges is essential to maintaining viable habitat and connectivity between more intact remnant vegetation areas.¹ The loss of individual hollow bearing trees has also been recognised as a threatening process for many dependent species.²

We submit that the VMOLA Bill fails to protect critically important old growth and veteran native trees where they are isolated from other protected vegetation. There is no other uniform protection at a Federal, State or local government level that provides any protection of individually important native paddock, urban or roadside trees. The protection of these highly significant trees is currently left to the discretion of the land manager or local government planning regulations.

¹ <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/research/pt-scattered-trees-journal-article.pdf>

² https://www.environment.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/1055648/Loss-of-Hollow-bearing-Trees-Nomination-for-Key-Threatening-Pro....pdf

We submit that the VMOLA Bill should include:

1. Clear and separate provisions to ensure that individual veteran, standing dead and hollow bearing native trees are protected from clearing and disturbance, where they are within otherwise unprotected areas such as paddocks, reserves and road verges.
2. A definition of veteran and old growth trees based on age, size and growth characteristics with input from community groups and experts in that subject.

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.³
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**

³ 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>

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 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 would be pleased to provide further supporting information and assistance to the inquiry if called upon.

Yours sincerely

Jan Allen

Director, Secretary and Founding Member

On behalf of Veteran Tree Group Australia (Ltd)