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22nd March 2018
Committee Secretary
State Development, Natural Resources
and Agricultural Industry Development Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000
Email: sdnraide@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 on this bill. This submission is made on behalf of Brisbane Residents United, Brisbane’s peak body for community resident actions groups. The charter of the BRU group is:

- Represent Brisbane and surrounding district residents and provide them with a united voice to Governments on matters pertaining to urban planning and development – the concept of united we might be heard, divided we are simply ignored and
- Act as a resource centre, facilitating information sharing across established and start-up local resident associations.

Queensland at present has one of the worlds worst records for deforestation and land clearing. AS stated in the Labor 2017 Policy Document Saving Habitat, Protecting Wildlife and Restoring Land: Ending broad scale tree clearing in Queensland (again) “The 2012-2014 SLATS report showed that the annual rate of clearing increased from 91,700 hectares, to almost 300,000 hectares.

This particular report covered two years as the LNP refused to release the damning data in 2012-13 .

The 2015-16 SLATS report shows that tree clearing has again increased, to four times the rate it was prior to the LNP coming into power, at nearly 400,000 hectares per year.

That's over 1,000 football fields of land being cleared each day.

Alarming, the 2015-16 SLATS report also showed that 40 per cent of all clearing state-wide is occurring in Great Barrier Reef catchments, putting at risk our beloved Great Barrier Reef and the livelihoods of so many Queenslanders who depend on it. It is riparian vegetation that holds riverbanks together and keeps sediment on land and out of the reef."

The Bill is a reasonable first step to address the state's deforestation and tree clearing crisis. Queensland's international reputation has suffered as a result of the extent of clearing that has occurred since the Newman Government destroyed our environmental protections and tree clearing laws. The resultant unprecedented large scale clearing has jeopardised our wildlife, impacted our Great Barrier Reef water quality and stifled work to reduce the risks of dangerous climate change.

These laws affect us all and they are not just about landholders be they public or private. Australia has a particular environment that has evolved to protect a fragile landscape that is unique and incredibly diverse. We have seen over the past few years that agriculture thrives when it works with rather than against the environment.

With the growing issues created by climate change and our increasing calls on the environment there has never been a more important time to get this legislation right. Our children and grandchildren will live with our mistakes.

We have not fully explored the rich bounty of our environment. New discoveries such as platypus milk possibly holding the key to developing antibiotics to fight super bugs. This is in addition to the 2016 research that discovered a hormone [contained in platypus venom](#) could actually help us develop new kinds of diabetes treatments.

The very thing we destroy today could be humanities saviour tomorrow. Extinction is forever.

With this in mind there are changes that must be made to strengthen the Bill, otherwise excessive clearing of wildlife habitats, impacts to Reef water quality and climate change emissions will continue.

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*). Water is our most precious resource and our watercourses need to be protected. Climate change is bringing about more extreme storm and flooding events and we need to take **EVERY** measure we can to try and protect the environment from these extreme weather events.
3. **Phasing out existing Area Management Plans** which have allowed significant clearing under lower regulation across Queensland; (*see clause 14*) There should be one level of good quality regulation across the state.
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*) The Great Barrier Reef is an incredible environmental and economic asset and we endanger it at our peril. It provides the economic lifeblood to hundreds of small businesses and many of the towns along the Queensland coast. It must be protected so that future generations can continue to enjoy that bounty. It would be a sad reflection on us if we were the generation that guaranteed its demise.

There must be adequate monitoring of compliance and meaningful fines for non compliance of those permits that are issued.

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.¹
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 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.

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

Public transparency and accountability in decision making processes are crucial to ensure the quality of decision making and process undertaken. The management of the risks faced by the environment is a public interest matter and must be treated as such, with provision for public scrutiny and involvement in decision making. Good quality maps and scientific reports need to be produced by the State government to allow Queenslanders to accurately judge the progress of environmental protections and funding.

Our environment is our life source and we ignore it at our peril. Increasingly our environment only seems to be valued for the profit or economic benefits it can generate. This is a short term view that will destroy us all in the end.

We call on the Queensland government to give serious consideration to our concerns to ensure that Queensland is moving towards the best vegetation management and environmental protection legislation. One that truly inspires confidence and certainty from all stakeholders and empowers our communities to meaningfully participate in the process. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or would like to discuss this matter further. We can be contacted on

We would like to appear before the committee in their hearing for this inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

Elizabeth Handley

President

Brisbane Residents United Inc