

Ms Carla ArchibaldSchool of Earth and Environmental Sciences
The University of QueenslandSubmission to Committee on
Vegetation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018

**Ms Carla Archibald,
School of Earth and Environmental Sciences,
The University of Queensland,
St Lucia 4072**

21th March 2018

Committee Secretary
State Development, Natural Resources and Agricultural Industry Development Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000
Email: sdhraidc@parliament.qld.gov.au

Submission to Committee on the *Vegetation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018* ('VMOLA Bill') inquiry

Dear Chair and committee members,

My name is Carla Archibald and I am a PhD student researching nature conservation and the environment with the Rhodes Conservation Group, School of Earth and Environmental Science, at The University of Queensland. I wish to comment on the *Vegetation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018*. Nature conservation on private land is my primary research output and I believe that, as it stands, the *Vegetation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018* does not provide adequate guidance on how Queensland can strike a balance between nature conservation and the provision of ecosystem services such as agricultural and timber outputs on private land.

General statement on Vegetation Management and the *Vegetation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018*

The *Vegetation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018* bill (henceforth VMOLA) has been introduced to address the government's commitment to end broad-scale tree clearing in Queensland. Vegetation management is a massively polarizing issue in Queensland that seems to evoke deep feelings of injustice from some members of society. It is important during this policy process that the government acknowledges all voices however, policy recommendations that are implemented should first align with the goal of the bill to end broad-scale tree clearing in Queensland.

Private land is a double edged sword for nature in Queensland, and Agriculturists in particular hold the weight of this balance in their hands. Agriculturists require a functioning environment to be productive and intrinsically should, and many are, stewards of their land. However, it seems from the Agriculturists point of view that they believe that they are being undermined by the new VMOLA amendments. I am unsure if this is because they truly do oppose the bill and the better protection of vegetation in Queensland, or (and perhaps more likely), they oppose the idea of the government advising them on how to manage "their" land (i.e. a loss of rights/autonomy over land).

Agriculturists are managing their land for private benefits, as well as the provision of public services and Conservationists are doing much of their work for the public good. This is one point of contention, as Agriculturists feel a restriction of vegetation management will single them out and personally affect the management of their businesses, rather than

Ms Carla Archibald

School of Earth and Environmental Sciences
The University of Queensland

Submission to Committee on
Vegetation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018

Conservationists or other members of society which are not financially invested. In general, I do not believe that vegetation management in Queensland will improve until these two groups, Agriculturalists and Conservationists, see eye-to-eye. The Queensland Government should invest resources into building the capacity between these two groups and demonstrating that they neither group wishes for the other to fail (in terms of profit margins, or in land cleared or species lost). I believe that some Agriculturalists do very much care for the environment, and that some Conservationists see the value in maximizing agricultural profits (i.e. much of the ecosystem services literature), however these beliefs are only shared by a small portion of the Agriculturalist and Conservationist communities.

To increase the cohesion between these two groups, I advise that the Queensland Government engage with behavioural change groups such as Behavioural Innovation (<https://www.behaviourinnovation.com/>) or departments within the Queensland Government (i.e. QLD DES Behavioural Insights Unit). As the fate of Queensland's biodiversity is primarily on the backs of Queensland farmers we need to try to shift their opinion about conservation and make them strong-arm biodiversity conservation. This has successfully been done in the Great Barrier Reef Catchment with Behavioural Innovation's "Set the Record Straight" campaign which sugar cane farmers committed to sustainably manage their land to reduce sediment run-off to the reef. A similar campaign could be successful within the young farming community in Queensland as they are particularly open to innovation and recognise that entrepreneurial skills are needed in Agriculture in 2018. Targeting the older generation of farmers which are less willing to change could be a greater challenge, however this group of farmers are most likely the groups which practice vegetation management in a way that is unsustainable for nature.

To engage some parts of the farming community innovative incentives should be reintroduces to promote the retention of nature on private land. Carbon markets have been proven in many counties to provide financial support to farmers and ensure the protection of forests. A voluntary market could be developed where by emitters or developers are required to purchase carbon offset (i.e. on agricultural land) to balance the carbon they are set to emit. This policy mechanism could also be a valuable method to tie the city to the country.

It seems like the definition of "vegetation management" is inconsistent between the two parties on the poles of this debate (Agriculturists and Conservationists). When Agriculturists use the refer to "vegetation management" they tend to be talking about the clearing of regrowth or forest to pasture, but when Conservationists refer to "vegetation management" they are talking about the retention of regrowth or forest for biodiversity. This mismatch in sentiment may be restricting a resolution to the conflict between why these two parties perceive vegetation management differently. Groups such as AgForce are also pushing the idea that not managing vegetation will lead to less biodiversity and more degraded land. These ideas have been continually perpetuated through AgForce and similar groups propaganda which fail to make reference to scientific literature. Conservation groups such as Green Peace and The Wilderness Society also tend to frame Agriculturists in a negative light, which further drives a wedge between these two groups. Advocacy is a necessary part of the policy process, however a resolution will not be met between nature conservation and the provision of agricultural and timber products on private land while these polarized ideologies are continually perpetuated in the media.

Researchers know that deforestation is the most severe in Queensland (see Figure 1, Panel a), and that stricter Vegetation Management can improve vegetation retention (see Figure 1, Panel b). Biodiversity in Queensland relies on the retention and management (in the conservation sense of the word) of forests on private land. Particularly, as the climate warms and wildlife move to areas of refuge. As the climate changes, and as life in 2018 requires people to be more flexible and adaptable.

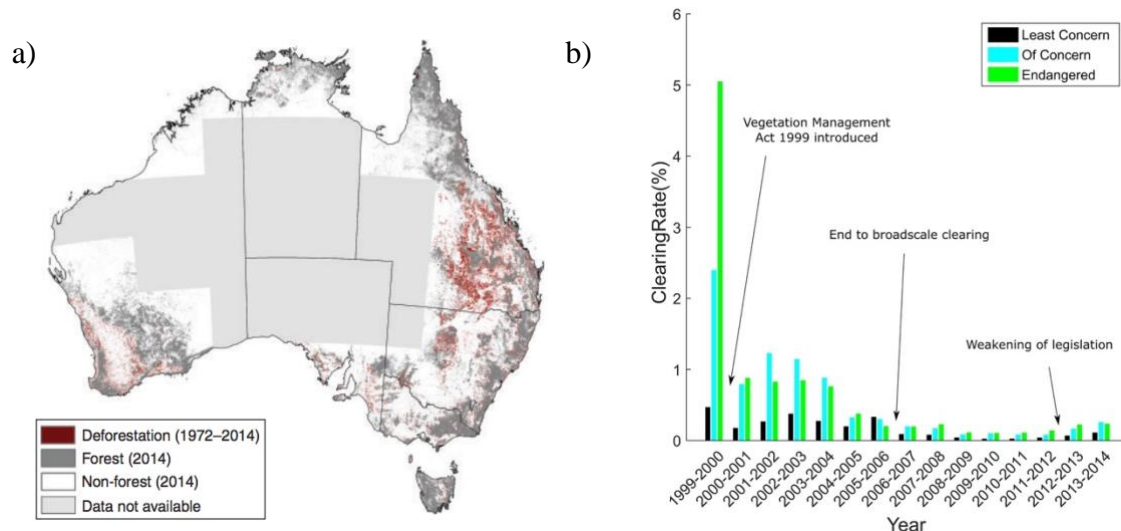
Ms Carla ArchibaldSchool of Earth and Environmental Sciences
The University of QueenslandSubmission to Committee on
Vegetation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018

Figure 1 Panel a) distribution of total deforestation events (primary and regrowth) attributed to human clearing between 1972-2014 (Evans 2016). Panel b) Annual proportional clearing rates of remnant woody vegetation (native forest) due to anthropogenic activities in Queensland since 1999, categorised by VMA Class (Rhodes et al 2017).

Specific details of Recommendations for the VMOLA

The following elements of the VMOLA Bill are strongly supported as they are a step toward the vision of the bill's amendments to end broad-scale tree 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*)
- 5. Remove the defence of claimed mistaken clearing, and restore the starting presumption that a landholder is responsible for clearing that takes place on their property.** By removing the claim of mistaken clearing, there is more of an incentive for landholder to be accountable for their actions, as oppose to the current process which has allowed significant clearing under across Queensland.
- 6. 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*)

Ms Carla Archibald

School of Earth and Environmental Sciences
The University of Queensland

Submission to Committee on
Vegetation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018

About me

I am a part of the Rhodes Conservation Group is headed by Associate Professor Jonathan Rhodes and is based at the University of Queensland in Brisbane. My PhD focuses on issues around private land conservation particularly, 1) what is the role of private land conservation 2) how effective is private land conservation, and 3) who engages in private land conservation. All to better inform how to increase future policy adoption and engagement, and to promote effective conservation on private lands.

If you would like to discuss further, please contact Ms Carla Archibald via email [REDACTED]. However, I would not like to appear before the Committee in their hearing for this inquiry.

Sincerely,

Ms Carla Archibald

Rhodes Conservation Group

*School of Earth and Environmental Sciences
The University of Queensland
St Lucia, Australia, 4072*

Peer-reviewed Scientific References

Evans, M.C. (2016). Deforestation in Australia: drivers, trends and policy responses. *Pacific Conserv. Biol.*, 3, 2–40.

Rhodes, J.R., Cattarino, L., Seabrook, L. & Maron, M. (2017). Assessing the effectiveness of regulation to protect threatened forests. *Biol. Conserv.*, 216, 33–42.