

From:
To: [SDNRAIDC](#)
Subject: VMA Amendment Bill Submission
Date: Thursday, 22 March 2018 9:15:36 AM
Attachments: [pastedImage.png](#)
Importance: High

Matthew Roetteler

21st of March 2018

Committee Secretary
State Development, Natural Resources
and Agricultural Industry Development Committee
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Dear Committee,

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

My name is Matthew Roetteler and I am currently in my honours year of study for my Environmental Science degree at the University of Queensland. My thesis is looking at the effectiveness of deforestation policy on reducing the rate of remnant vegetation clearing in the Great Barrier Reef Catchment. The suggestions below highlight the amendments that I support and those that I believe are required to effectively reduce land clearing to an acceptable level. However, I cannot stress the need enough for target-based regulation with tree clearing credit trading schemes that has successfully work in other countries like Brazil. Recent papers have shown that current deforestation policy in Queensland is insufficient to combat the continuous decline of native remnant and regrowth vegetation loss^{<!--[if !supportFootnotes]-->[1]<!--[endif]-->}^{<!--[if !supportFootnotes]-->[2]<!--[endif]-->}. Without setting a cap on the amount of land clearing that is allowed in Queensland, we are subjecting the state to a continuous incremental loss of our native remnant vegetation and consequently the habitat for some of our most beloved species. The mentality can no longer be that we need to just reduce land clearing and that is sufficient, we need to start reversing the effects of historic land clearing and begin to restore the ecosystems that have been so heavily degraded to their natural ecological states which should be an aim of the act rather than just maintaining the ecological processes of the minimal vegetation that remains. We owe it to the incredible biodiversity that is found in Queensland along with our World Heritage reef to do better and we owe it to our hard-working farmers to incentivise and assist where possible with the transition to reforestation. Continuing with business as usual until what is left of our native forests can no longer support viable populations of the native species that have called this state home for a lot longer than we have is not acceptable. Lastly, more must be done to incorporate the traditional owners of the land into the

decision making of land clearing laws in Queensland as their knowledge is an untapped resource that we are yet to fully utilise.

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*)

I generally support the following amendments, however it is essential that they are strengthened by these 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. [\[if !supportFootnotes\]-->\[3\]<!--\[endif\]-->](#)
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.

Yours sincerely,

Matthew Roetteler

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<!--[if !supportFootnotes]-->[1]<!--[endif]--> Rhodes, J.R., Cattarino, L., Seabrook, L. and Maron, M., 2017. Assessing the effectiveness of regulation to protect threatened forests. *Biological Conservation*, 216, pp.33-42.

<!--[if !supportFootnotes]-->[2]<!--[endif]--> Reside, A.E., Beher, J., Cosgrove, A.J., Evans, M.C., Seabrook, L., Silcock, J.L., Wenger, A.S. and Maron, M., 2017. Ecological consequences of land clearing and policy reform in Queensland. *Pacific Conservation Biology*, 23(3), pp.219-230.

<!--[if !supportFootnotes]-->[3]<!--[endif]--> 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>