

*J J Bridle & JM Owens***20 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**

Our interest in making a submission on this amendment bill arises out of concern for the survival of this state’s biodiversity and along with it the habitat that supports our native wildlife and flora. Some thirty years ago we moved to SE Queensland and until then had not really appreciated the importance of the natural environment to our survival and how fundamental to our survival was the protection of the integrity of the natural environmental assets under our collective care. We write as citizens not representing any organization although we are supporters and members of Gecko Environment Council, The Australian Conservation Foundation and Wildlife Qld.

The Government of Campbell Newman struck incomprehensible and savage blows to Queensland’s environment with its total disregard for the connectedness of .....natural ...committing almost irreparable damage. We hope that the amendments proposed under this bill will go a good way to halting that decline.

We strongly support the following elements of the VMOLA Bill as they are measures that promise to help cut back on the excessive clearing in Queensland enabled by the Campbell Newman Government:

- 1. Removal of the ability to obtain permits for high value agriculture and high value irrigated agriculture.** Whilst the production of food is essential and therefore high value agriculture and high value irrigated agriculture are not to be summarily dismissed, proposed projects of this kind must not be the cause of broadscale habitat destruction or be used for other purposes. Between 2013-2016 the Statewide Landcover and Trees Study found that these permit types enabled the clearing of 10% of mature bushland, without providing sufficient verification that the land was high value agricultural land, or was indeed needed for agriculture, or 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).** The removal of

these permits enabled acts of environmental vandalism that laid waste to habitat and watercourse systems with permanent and devastating effect.

3. **Phasing out existing Area Management Plans.** The sooner these plans can be erased the better. They have allowed significant clearing under lower regulation across Queensland and as we have witnessed contributed to significant habitat destruction; *(see clause 14)*
4. **Extended protections of regrowth vegetation near watercourses across Great Barrier Reef catchments,** , including Eastern Cape York, Fitzroy and Burnett-Mary catchments which were not protected under the VM Act currently, is essential in order to reduce damaging runoff. *(see clauses 133 and 38)*

We support the following amendments. At the same time we believe it is essential that they are strengthened by the amendments proposed by conservation groups in order to genuinely reduce excessive clearing of wildlife habitat, impacts to the Great Barrier Reef and climate change emissions ( a subject which seems to have disappeared but which annually shows how threatening it is by the number of natural disasters afflicting Queensland but also many other states):

5. **Improved protected of ‘high value regrowth vegetation’**, being vegetation that has grown back well after being cleared. The broader definition created by the Bill, including vegetation that hasn’t been cleared for 15 years and re-extending regulation to freehold, indigenous land and occupational licences *(see clause 38)* is very welcome.
6. However, the Queensland Government made an election commitment that can only be met by extending protection to high conservation value regrowth vegetation. Therefore we support extra and necessary amendments to enable much more extensive protection including vegetation in reef catchments, riparian areas, endangered vegetation species and communities, threatened species habitat and areas where landscape integrity is at risk.<sup>1</sup>
7. **Tightening of the definition of ‘thinning’ (now known as ‘managing thickened vegetation’) is supported.** It is just commonsense that the Bill now requires that thinning activities must ‘maintain ecological processes and prevent loss of diversity’. However 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)*
8. However, the way to truly reduce the significant clearing previously enabled under ‘thinning’, is to stop it being a permit or code allowable activity, particularly for mature and high value regrowth vegetation and under existing Area Management Plans. Currently ‘thinning’ can include clearing up to 75% of a forest and has been responsible for significant clearing across Queensland without any scientific justification that this is a necessary activity at all.
9. **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. We support this clarification.
10. However, it is clear very little will be achieved if the Bill is not changed to ***require*** amendment of maps that lock in unregulated clearing of all high value vegetation. With

<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>

devastating effect, under the Newman Government, significant areas of Queensland were locked in under property level maps which gave the go-ahead to the clearing of unregulated 'category X' even though the clearing would destroy mature, high value vegetation. Map amendment cannot be left to the discretion of the land owner without leaving significant areas of Queensland unprotected from unregulated clearing.

11. Finally the Bill does not crack down on excessive clearing allowed under fodder harvesting codes. This omission must be addressed with an amendment that fodder harvesting should be limited to times when there is an official drought declaration. The thorny question of land suitability for grazing herds of non-native creatures and the need for graziers/land holders to provide stores of fodder for their animals in the event of drought must also be addressed if we are ever to adequately look after this land and survive climate change.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment

Yours sincerely

JBridle & *John Owens*