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Committee Secretary
State Development, Natural Resources
and Agricultural Industry Development Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Old 4000
Email: sdnraidc@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary,

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

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the State Development, Natural Resources and Agricultural Industry Development Committee in relation to the *Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018* ('VMOLA Bill') inquiry.

Who we are

The Bimblebox Alliance Inc (TBA) is a conservation organisation that aims to protect Bimblebox Nature Refuge, other Nature Refuges and Private Protected Areas from coal mining and other extractive industries that threaten biodiversity and those areas' ongoing existence. Our major objectives are: to protect the natural environment; to conserve the natural values of Bimblebox; and to conserve the natural values of other Protected Areas.

Why we are making this submission

Habitat fragmentation and loss are major contributors to biodiversity loss and species extinction in Queensland. We hope that the proposed legislation will prevent further habitat degradation, and hence conserve remaining plant and animal species and ecosystems currently under threat. This would go some way to achieving TBA's aims as listed above. We intend to conserve and improve Queensland's biodiversity for our children, grandchildren and all future generations.

Our key points

This submission includes observations from Paola Cassoni, a grazier's wife from Central Queensland since 1984 and co-owner of Bimblebox Nature Refuge. Since the early 80s, CQ

has been one of the areas worst affected by broad-scale land clearing. In 2012 landowners in the area took the window of opportunity opened by Campbell Newman's government to clear at will, but the systematic destruction/panic clearing of native vegetation in pastoral leases started in 2015, when Newman lost to the ALP and farmers raced to beat Labor's promised revised land-clearing policy. The tragedy is that many landowners were not convinced that clearing was the best for the long-term productivity of their land but were peer pressured to clear while they still could and had no time to explore possible alternatives. After talking to scientists visiting Bimblebox and her fellow landowners, Ms Cassoni offers her reflections on nurturing native vegetation diversity within marginal grazing country so that a healthy environment combines with sustainable income.

1. All existing tree clearing approvals should be revoked

The Hon Dr Anthony Lynham MP stated in his Introductory Speech for the VMOLA Bill that all existing approvals will be honoured¹. We strongly disagree with this intent.

Firstly, we need to stabilize the patient. The government should impose an immediate moratorium on ALL land clearing, revoking existing permits. The current approvals came from flawed legislation that took no account of any rights except those of the landowner to clear. This is the wrong approach if the focus of the legislation is to preserve and protect habitats.

2. Consultation with scientists is essential

From the response of the grazing community to previous land clearing policies, we learned that 'one size fits all' doesn't achieve the best results for the survival of ecosystems and sustainable grazing, so scientists need to be included in the drafting of the policy. Experts (not politicians!) must work on a draft of how to remain economically and environmentally sustainable. If enough data is not available, then more research will need to be done.

3. GPS co-ordinates need to define precisely an area to be cleared

Existing and future clearing permits need to be extremely precise, with GPS co-ordinates to define the area to be cleared.

4. Clearing permit: owner and earth-moving contractor both accountable

The new legislation needs to hold both the owner of the permit and the earth-moving contractor accountable for working within the permit's guidelines. The latter must sign off the job. If he/she contravenes by clearing extra bushland, he/she should be fined, while the owner of the permit (usually the landowner) should rehabilitate by returning the original habitat at his or her own expense. Rehabilitation expenses should not be tax deductible. Replanting projects must have measurable results within a specified time frame. It may take a few decades. If the land that has begun to be rehabilitated is sold before completion of rehabilitation, the sale should include in the contract the obligatory continuation of the project until the rehabilitation is signed off by a government official.

¹ The Hon Dr Anthony Lynham MP, 8 March 2018, Introductory Speech for VMOLA Bill
www.parliament.qld.gov.au/documents/tableOffice/BillMaterial/180308/Veg.pdf

5. Compensation for reduction in soil carrying capacity

The degree of drive to clear land depends upon soil types; the more productive the soil type for grazing, the less of that ecosystem is likely to be left, to the extent that in 230 years some have almost disappeared such as the Brigalow Belt, endangered since 2001 (EPBC Act, 2001).

The government could consider flexible rates and rents on grazing properties in order to reduce the financial pressure when the property cannot be cleared and encourage greater receptivity to conservation.

6. Incentives for rehabilitation after sale of land

If land for sale has been legally cleared, a new buyer could be offered government financial incentives to rehabilitate a percentage of the landscape.

7. First draft as a 'discussion paper' to encourage compliance

Some graziers will not welcome the proposed bill as they will feel that their freedom to shape the land has been removed. The graziers should feel part of a discussion process within a medium that they are comfortable with, usually verbal and visual.

We strongly advise discussion of the proposed legislation before its approval within regions where the clearing practice has been active. The Government should fund Natural Resource Management groups, including The Desert Uplands Build-Up and Development Strategy Committee, and Catchment Management Authority groups to organize science-based forums where graziers will be asked for their input as stakeholders, and, if contrary to the proposed legislation, to justify it with evidence and statistics. Forums should include not only scientists but also rural economists, and, if necessary, they should visit properties and take graziers' input to a review panel.

In our view, the success of compliance depends upon the open minds of all parties.

8. On-going monitoring of clearing activities

Once the legislation is in place there should be constant monitoring of clearing activities using all available latest technologies.

9. No tax deductibility for illegal clearing

Expenses incurred during illegal land clearing and penalties applied should not be tax deductible.

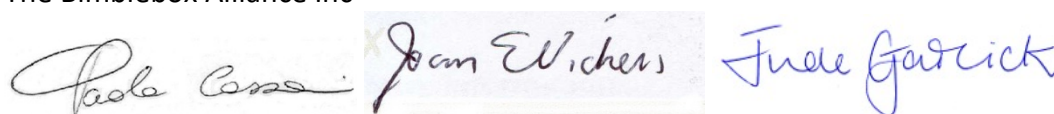
10. All Private Protected Areas to be protected from land clearing

Since this is a Vegetation Management Bill, we would like to suggest the inclusion of a complete veto on land clearing permits to extractive industries in all Private Protected Areas in order to conserve ecosystems and enable the potential for wildlife refugia in line with the purpose of the establishment of such Protected Areas.

11. Climate change mitigation

The retention of tree cover is a critical element of climate mitigation, linked to both emissions and temperature reduction and water conservation. Farmers across the Australian continent are already changing their methods in order to adapt to seasonal changes, which are no longer regarded as part of perennial drought cycles. Rule books are being set aside in favour of new and not-so-new-but-different methodologies. The names may vary from region to region – regenerative farming or natural sequence farming, for example – but the message is the same and trees are crucial. In the absence of governmental leadership on climate change, farmers are getting on with it, hopefully increasingly with the support of science and the wider community.

Yours sincerely,
The Bimblebox Alliance Inc



Paola Cassoni, President; Joan Vickers, Treasurer; Jude Garlick, Public Relations; and Sheena Gillman, Management Committee Member