

PO Box 269 3 Porters Lane  
Nambour QLD 4560

info@scec.org.au

T 07 5441 5747 F 07 5441 7478

www.scec.org.au

SUNSHINE COAST  
Environment Council



22 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](mailto:sdnraidc@parliament.qld.gov.au)

Dear Committee,

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

The Sunshine Coast Environment Council appreciates the opportunity to provide comment on the VMOLA Bill and sees it as a critical step towards reining in excessive and unsustainable rates of vegetation clearing in Queensland. We also acknowledge there are many stewards of the land who employ sustainable practices to produce our food and fibre. It is our view that this Bill is not seeking to constrain such responsible endeavours but to act on the clear evidence of the escalating impacts occurring due to the alarming extent of vegetation clearing.

Established in 1980, the Sunshine Coast Environment Council (SCEC) is the peak environmental advocacy organisation for the Sunshine Coast region. SCEC currently represents 60 member groups predominantly working in the areas of natural resource management, conservation, environmental restoration and protection and sustainability. This membership represents a collective of almost 10,000 individuals with a further 4000 people as SCEC supporters.

It is on behalf of our members, supporters and wider community with whom we engage that we submit the following comment for due consideration.

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 (SLATS) 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)*



SCEC generally supports the following amendments; however, it is essential they are strengthened by our proposed amendments to effectively 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.<sup>1</sup>
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, and should particularly not apply 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 and consequential impacts across Queensland without scientific justification that this is a necessary or sustainable activity.
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.
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. 'Devolving' map amendment up to the land owner will leave significant areas of Queensland vulnerable to unregulated clearing.
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.

## **ADDITIONAL COMMENT**

<sup>1</sup> 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>

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SCEC takes this opportunity to highlight the unacceptable loss of habitat and biodiversity within the SEQ Urban Footprint due to the range of permissible exemptions. Our comment relates specifically to the Sunshine Coast Local Planning Area. The alarming spike in cumulative loss and impacts can be linked, in part, to regressive changes to the *Sustainable Planning Regulation 2009 (Qld)*.

The *Sustainable Planning Regulation 2009 (Qld)* provided a trigger for when development that is reconfiguring a lot (**ROL**) or material change of use (**MCU**) involving clearing vegetation will require assessment by the State Government.

Prior to 2013, this trigger required referral to the State Government of assessable development applications involving clearing of vegetation for ROL and MCU, where the lot is 2ha or larger.

Under changes made by the Newman Government, the trigger for referral for this clearing was increased to 5ha.

This increase in the lot size threshold to trigger referral creates concerning scope for an increase in clearing that is not subject to strong, consistent assessment of the sustainability of that clearing, and any cumulative impacts it may pose.

This higher trigger has subsequently remained unchanged in the *Planning Act 2016* and its regulations which came into effect on 03 July 2017.

Under the current provisions, there is almost 8000ha of remnant and non-remnant native vegetation in the Sunshine Coast Local Area Plan lacking adequate and protections.

SCEC requests the government reverts the trigger back to 2ha for both ROL and MCU relevant clearing applications and seeks avenues for this to be restored.

While this trigger is not in itself may not be considered a significant cause of broadscale clearing, it is an evident contributor to an obvious and growing problem in SEQ as it provides an 'as of right' to clear most peri-urban and urban lots.

We note that even a trigger of 2ha is quite substantial, with some scientific analysis showing that it should be 0.2ha given that it is the minimum patch size for a forest to be considered a forest under Kyoto rules.

Yours sincerely

Narelle McCarthy  
Liaison and Advocacy