

Koala Action Group Qld Inc
PO Box 660
Capalaba Qld 4157
ABN 85 618 891 610
www.koalagroup.asn.au

Email: sdnraidc@parliament.qld.gov.au

Committee Secretary
State Development , Natural Resources
and Agricultural Industry Development Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

22 March 2018

SUBMISSION ON THE VEGETATION MANAGEMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

The Koala Action Group Queensland (KAG) has been very concerned about the uncontrolled vegetation clearing in Queensland in the last few years and its effect on koalas and other wildlife. We appreciate the work that has gone on to ensure that a more scientific approach is taken with regard to the impacts caused by this clearing.

The following elements of the VMOLA Bill are strongly supported as they are a first 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*)

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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*)

KAG Qld generally support the following amendments, however it is essential that they are strengthened by proposed amendments to truly reduce excessive clearing of wildlife habitat, impacts to the Great Barrier Reef and climate change emissions:

1. **Improved protection 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*).
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.
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.

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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.

8. The Bill does not include the reversal of the onus of proof offence provision, nor the removal of the mistake of fact defence provisions, which were previously in the VM Act prior to the amendments by the Newman Government.

Conclusion

KAG is hopeful that the proposed laws will help to stem the clearing of koala habitat in Queensland. However, we are hopeful that after acceptance of this step that the Government will look more closely at limiting the development-driven vegetation clearing that is occurring in South East Queensland that is sending our koalas to near extinction.

Yours sincerely,

Lynn Roberts B Sc (AES)
Vice-President KAG
Email: