

Dear Committee Secretary

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

Thank you for providing the opportunity to make a submission to your Committee about this extremely important proposed legislation.

I am a conservationist and environment blogger/writer who, until last November, lived in Queensland for seven and a half years.

I had high hopes for the Vegetation Management bill in its previous incarnation so am particularly concerned that the current proposed legislation is successful.

I have several aspects of concern with regard to land clearing that I am confident will have been adequately addressed in other submissions to the Committee. Principally, and briefly, in no particular order of importance are:

1 Queensland's increasingly threatened ecosystems, particularly in regions that have already been extensively cleared for grazing or resource/urban/infrastructure development. I believe the Government should now be much more proactive in conserving remnant vegetation, for example in the Desert Uplands bioregion of Central Queensland and, more highly profiled, koala habitat in the state's southeast.

2 Endangered fauna and flora must be prevented from joining a growing list of extinctions by means of conservation in genuinely protected refuges in which vegetation is left intact, watertight prevention of clearing for agriculture or forestry, and the removal of exception from the law by virtue of the generation of state revenue. I refer in the last example to extractive industries.

3 With the continued inadequacy of state or federal climate mitigation legislation, the preservation of intact ecosystems becomes ever more important. The role of trees in reducing carbon emissions, reducing temperature extremes, aiding rainfall reliability, retaining water in natural systems, and providing refugia for fauna increasingly stressed by changing climatic conditions within their range.

There are many more aspects, but I hope they are dealt with by other submitters. I must draw greater attention, however, to one major concern of mine, and others I know. And that is exemptions. It is my understanding that 'Category X' areas account for a significantly large proportion of the total area of cleared land in Queensland. I have seen one report that put that proportion as greater than two-thirds. If the proposed legislation will not protect forest or bushland in that vast area mapped as exempt, it is extremely hard to imagine that the Government will realise its intention to reduce clearing rates substantially and thus prevent large numbers of fauna and flora from being displaced and wiped out altogether.

I understand further that Category X areas are not mapped in order to establish the rates of regrowth of remnant vegetation or high-conservation-value regrowth and the extent to which this is being bulldozed.

All in all, it would appear that not only is research necessary to establish effective criteria for the management and monitoring of these currently exempt areas, but also that their very existence should be questioned. It would not be my intention to recommend delay of your considerations, but I can see no alternative. Such a large area of potentially cleared lands that the public is largely unaware of and that would not be included in the Government's plans cannot continue to be ignored because of landowners' lobbying or its presence in the 'too difficult box'. I would therefore urge you to consult widely on this issue alone before referral back to Government for further work prior to your deliberations.

With kind regards

Jude Garlick