

Date 19-3-2018

Committee Secretary
State Development, Natural Resources
and Agricultural Industry Development Committee
Parliament House
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Dear Committee

Submission to the Inquiry in *Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018*

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the above Inquiry. This submission is made on behalf of Gary Dunn and Frances Ford.

My name is Gary Dunn and I have lived here on this bush block in far north Queensland with Frances Ford since 1996, where, on surrounding leases and licences, we have witnessed illegal land clearing and weed infestations that have caused erosion to the creeks and river banks and damage to the natural plant diversity on and off our property. This has been brought about by people bringing cattle onto land not suited for cattle grazing and the total devastation involved in the clearing of land for mining.

Queensland has witnessed a surge in land clearing since laws and policies were seriously weakened by the Newman LNP Government. It is now time to ensure our native woodlands, the native wildlife that relies on them for their habitats and the iconic Great Barrier Reef, are afforded much better protection. Over time, the community needs to see reforms leading to land clearing rates falling significantly.

We strongly support the government's intention to substantially strengthen Queensland's land clearing laws. Overall, we note and endorse the Bill in seeking to achieve:

- The removal of high value agriculture as a relevant clearing purpose and the scrapping of that permit process;
- The re-protection of high conservation value regrowing woodlands, under a broader definition that includes ecologically significant woodlands that are 15 or more years old;
- The scrapping of the Thinning 'self-assessable' accepted development clearing code;
- The extension of riparian area protections to the last three Great Barrier Reef catchments;
- The capacity to reclassify Category X into Category A;
- The reinstatement of Riverine Protection Permits; and
- The termination of current Area Management Plans.

While **we** would prefer to see the total removal of provisions for 'managing thickening', and would strongly endorse changes to the Bill in that regard, **we** recognise that a second-based

option is to have the revised processes and tests that would be established under the Bill as a means of delivering a greater level of protection for some native woodlands.

The bill should also have an inquiry into why vegetation management is not working.

1. Firstly, it is impossible to get anyone in the Natural Resources and Mines to take your complaint seriously. They send a response saying that the Minister has asked them to reply to your request...we know this is not true as, in a meeting with the then Minister, Stephen Robertson, in his last months as Minister, we handed him our concerns along with his replies. He was quite angry that he had no knowledge of either. He then told his Director General, John Bradley, who was also present, to look into our complaints. However, and although we were given a direct contact number for Bradley, he avoided our phone calls.
2. Our complaints are mostly about criminal damage by cattle to our land, our fences, our gardens and fruit trees... They pollute the water in our dams and destroyed our entire irrigation and sprinkler systems, now, too expensive for us to replace. Dozens of fruit trees Have been eaten down to the ground and there has been absolute destruction of our banana plantation.
3. The dividing fences act doesn't apply to Crown or Occupational Yearly License...meaning the licensees are not liable under this act, to join or contribute to the construction or repair of a dividing fence between unalienated crown land and other land. Knowing this, the licensees of the land around us would come in the night and either cut or remove our fences. They told us and other neighbours that they had grazing and water rights over all the land and water around here, freehold or not. Lately, people have been turning up all over the place, having the same problems.
4. Presently, to lease any land, you have to have a rates-notice...i.e. only if you have land, can you get the authority over more state land...which is land that is supposed to belong to the Australian people. The system is designed so that the same few can take it all. This has markedly contributed to the explosion in the rate of homelessness which has to be addressed.
5. We ask that the bill be made fairer to all Australians, by restricting the amount of land for any one family. These leases and licenses are far too big and contribute nothing to the local communities. They illegally close roads and tell tourists (a lot of whom are following a GPS) that they are trespassing. The Council says if we want better roads, get more rate payers.... or at least, shouldn't it be that the holders of the leases and licenses should pay the same as us for every 25 hectares? At the moment, in fact, these people pay so little that even their present leases have to be subsidized by the taxpayers just to cover the administrative costs. There are plenty of people around Australia who are very interested in a piece of this land to settle on. By living here, they would create a lot more jobs than a couple of people and a few cows... or the mining set-ups that are past their use-by dates; who pay out the directors and walk away leaving the workers unpaid and huge debts to the community, not to mention its social fabric in tatters. This way, there can be small areas of land to be cleared and large buffer zones to cushion the effects...a more balanced approach that the environment can absorb.

6. We would also ask for a bill to police and prosecute public servants who ignore safety and property damage concerns from freehold land owners. Wyndham Creek Rd is our only access at this time, as the licensees have blocked the public road to the north and the lease holder to the south-west of us says that the public road belongs to him. So he has dammed Wyndham Creek thus blocking our only access when it rains. The local police sergeant who comes from, as he says, real cattle country, refuses to do his job when it comes to these people. He says it's up to the owner of the road to make the complaint... That's the council... and five months and a letter to the Ombudsman later, our road access is still high vehicles only. There are several locals and a tourist that have received damage to their cars after driving into what they thought was just a puddle, only to find there is water up in their engines.
7. Our main points are that there are too many Australians in need of a piece of land to live on and support local communities. There are too many, too big land leases in areas like here, that do not employ many if any people at all. Preference should be given to people who haven't got land rather than the present system where you need a rates-notice before you can take out another lease.
8. And it is not that such stipulations are specifically contained in the Land Act but rather that, because all the so-called land laws are open to "Administrative Interpretation," there is much room for the mal-administrative decisions that have occurred. These set a precedence which accommodates the corruption which is allowing such monumental environmental disasters as the destruction of the natural plant diversity that, in itself, once made the wild fires self-limiting... as well as the imminent obliteration of the Great Barrier Reef (which means of the entire eastern sea-board.)
9. An example of such a mal-administrative decision was when John Charles from Mareeba DERM, granted a water licence for the irrigation of pasture which would allow for the draining of Crook's Dam, a dam so long established that it has become a stop-over for migratory birds. His decision was based entirely on the "information he had obtained from the applicants themselves" which was far from accurate. When we approached Gary Jensen, then in charge of all water allocations for North Queensland, he said that John Charles had done nothing wrong; that he had been required to make a decision which he had done; that he had not been required to make "an informed decision." Something must be done. Such practices cannot be sustained. Not only must various laws be enacted to further protect the natural environment, ways must be effectively introduced to control the administrative interpretation of those laws so that "the spirit of the law" is upheld. There must be procedures put in place such that the abuses that are happening now are stopped (and cannot reoccur.)
10. We have heard much about "The Northern Australian Infrastructure Facility" and the applications for loans ...to DeLacy to clear vast tracts of land in arid areas to irrigate and grow food and thus irreversibly interfere with the delicate environmental water balance that sustains that whole ecosystem... Or to Adani so that he can wipe out the Great Barrier Reef completely. Both of these schemes are destined for failure (after the money is gone) but what about grants and low interest loans to ordinary Australians so that they can take up smaller areas of this state land, to settle and become contributing members of the community instead of being part of the homeless problem. Then they can pay rates and shop locally and stop the spread of the ghost towns that is resulting from most of the land being taken up by the cattle people and the miners as is happening NOW.

11. It is, as the Head of Transparency International Australia, Serena Lillywhite, said in her radio broadcast, that the root cause of most corruption in big business is through the mining and land lease application and approval system and from our experience, we emphatically agree. It is the core problem and must be addressed.

And so... Thank you once again for the opportunity to raise these matters. **we** would welcome any invitation to appear in front of the Committee or to assist your Inquiry in any other way. Should you require any further information about this submission, please do not hesitate to contact **us**.

Yours sincerely,

Gary Dunn and Frances Ford.

Name Gary Dunn and Frances Ford.