

SDNRAIDC

From: Steph Bennett
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To: SDNRAIDC
Subject: Submission for Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018 - Stephanie Leanne Rasche

Submission for Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018

Submission by:
Name: Stephanie Leanne Rasche

I, Stephanie Leanne Rasche am writing this submission to show my significant support for the major strengthening of the tree-clearing laws in Queensland. I have tried to break this submission into two (2) areas; the effects on our native fauna followed by some points regarding our native flora and our waterways.

As a resident of the Moreton Bay Region (Previously Pine Rivers Shire) for almost 20 years I have seen a drastic clearing of the vegetation within this region, as well as many other regions in Queensland that I have visited. In this timeframe, along with witnessing these drastic reductions in our native vegetation (very high value vegetation areas – large trees/high value understory growth areas/critically important rainforest areas) I have also noticed a great decline in critically endangered native animals. Animals such as the Koala, Tiger Quoll, Phascogle, various species of Gliders as well as valued butterflies such as the Richmond Birdwing Butterfly were all sighted on a regular basis when I first relocated to this region. Now in 2018, it is incredibly rare to spot any of these animals, some (such as the Tiger Quoll, now believed to be almost certainly extinct in the Brisbane region) I have not seen in this area within the last five (5) years.

These observations are supported by many studies showing clear statistical evidence for dramatic declines in animal populations in South East Queensland (SEQ). Using the Koala as an example, an Australian Icon that is seems the rest of the world cannot fathom us 'not protecting'; A 2015 report ('South East Queensland Koala Population Modelling Study') showed a decline in densities of around 80% in the Koala Coast area and 54% in the formerly named Pine Rivers area between 1996 and 2014. This is an absolutely catastrophic finding for the future of these animals. Further to this, these findings were despite current protection measures and instead of finding a slowing in the rate of decline, there was evidence to suggest the rate of decline had accelerated.

I am a full-time Native Animal Rescuer (a voluntary role I hold in the community) and specialise in rehabilitating injured native animals. The impact on land clearing has drastically increased the animals that I have seen come into care to be rehabilitated. Many are displaced because of land clearing, their habitats destroyed and many immature animals are orphaned due to the loss or separation of/from their parents because of this clearing. Figures by our leading wildlife Hospitals such as Currumbin Sanctuary, RSPCA and Australia Zoo Wildlife Hospital show a huge increase in native animals being admitted to Wildlife Hospitals.

From a future conservation and preservation perspective of vegetation in Queensland, the clearing of various types of treed habitats has varied follow-on effects to the rest of our environment. The clearing of very large trees drastically reduces available hollows in trees, which offer a safe home for many animal species – birds, gliders, bats etc with some hollows taking hundreds of years to form. The clearing of both

mature trees but also the younger trees that would replace them in natural succession as they died off naturally (if left and were not cleared) means that the larger trees are not replaced, therefore there is little chance new hollows will have the opportunity to form, further encouraging a decline in our wildlife in crisis and nature's natural vegetation regeneration process for many years to come, not just imminently.

With regard to clearing the dense understory, (which has a great effect on the habitat of our native animals; understory areas are often a great source of food and protection to our native animals) the loss of understory also greatly impacts nature's ability to manage exotic and invasive weeds (such as Lantana, Madeira Vine, Asparagus plant and Cat's Claw Vine, just to name a few!). Clearing this understory simply paves the way for these invasive weeds to overtake, being much more aggressive and fast growing than our native flora.

I am involved with much re-vegetation planting in our area, specifically along the North Pine River. There is a great dominance of many invasive, aggressive weeds in this area (due to its previous clearing). The native plants simply cannot compete with much more aggressive growing, exotic plants. I have also seen in my time assisting in this re-vegetation (I have been involved for the past 6 years) that there is a serious lack of very high value plants left in areas with previous clearing. Smaller native plants, that are less aggressive growing plants, such as *Hovea Acutifolia* (a native plant that once covered much of South East QLD and is a wonderful food plant for many insects, birds and mammals that now is seldom spotted), *Psychotria*, *Pavetta* as well as many ground orchids, are overtaken by exotic grasses that are incredibly aggressive. The native ground covers simply cannot compete.

Given this lack of understory and quality groundcovers, there are areas of great erosion that would not have eroded if this native flora had been left, preventing erosion. This erosion (and lack of quality natives grasses, herbs etc) along our waterways leads to poor water quality and a serious disconnection of the habitats that were once connected along these waterways. There is an urgent need to protect our streams, creeks and rivers and protect and regenerate the connectivity of these habitats along these streams and creeks.

I hope my submission has provided some points of discussion when considering the legislation that affects vegetation clearing in Queensland. I feel blessed to live in such a spectacular part of the world and am wildly passionate in protecting and re-generating it for the future.

Stephanie Leanne Rasche