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21 March 2018

Committee Secretary
State Development, Natural Resources
and Agricultural Industry Development Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000
Via email: sdnraidc@parliament.qld.gov.au

To whom it may concern

Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018

The Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils (FNQROC) was established in the 1980's and represents 13 member councils from Hinchinbrook, north to Cook and west to Carpentaria in far north Queensland. FNQROC is currently the largest ROC in Queensland. The area covers 1,235km of the eastern seaboard with a land area of 319,063 sq km and a population of approximately 273,000.

We welcome the opportunity to provide comment on the proposed amendment. As an organisation representing 13 local governments (17% of Queensland's Councils) in Far North Queensland it is important we provide comment on matters which have direct or indirect influence on councils and the livelihoods and well-being of our communities.

With a gross regional product of \$14.5bn and the base economies being driven primarily by both tourism (\$3.3bn) and primary industries (\$2.5bn) we are cognisant that striking a balance between environmental protection and agricultural endeavour is integral to our ongoing prosperity. Since its inception in legislation vegetation management has been a disruptive, often divisive issue which has suffered from dramatic swings in policy and practice with each successive government. This is evidenced by a readily discernible increase in woody vegetation clearing rates following legislative amendments such as the 91% increase from 2011/12 during 2014/15, the highest rate since 2005/06¹, following what most would consider a relaxation of restrictions on clearing. Statistics like this demonstrate the legislative purpose of the Act is not being achieved in an environment where it is subject to an almost continual state of contest and review.

¹ State of the Environment, 2016. Queensland Government.

We are mindful of the diversity of the perspectives and requirements in regard to vegetation management of our member councils and their constituents and continue to have concerns at a one size fits all approach to vegetation management. In our submission we have provided an overall commentary on elements most relevant to councils being;

- a) the day to day operations of councils by way of strategic planning and infrastructure management and;
- b) the regional economic development considerations in which councils are engaged.

As per our previous submission we acknowledge the proposed amendments align with the purpose of the Act, however many of the practical implications are unable to be unpacked until the supporting regulation and policies are available or developed. We consider it essential for the State to conduct detailed and ongoing consultation with local governments in the implementation of amendments pertinent to council's strategic and operational priorities and are in support of the Local Government Association of Queensland's (LGAQ) recommendations to the same effect.

As we have emphasised in previous submissions we continue to be concerned at the stop/start and cyclical nature of this legislation. It is more apparent than ever that a policy environment which transitions the burden of maintaining the public benefits of vegetation protection from the sole responsibility of individual landholders to a shared investment across all beneficiaries is warranted. We would welcome an environment where achieving vegetation protection is supported through economic or stewardship incentives for landholders so we all might benefit from their efforts undertaken or opportunities forfeited.

We also maintain consideration should be given to future investment in appropriately scaled and consulted regional approaches which better define nodes for agricultural or other intensive land uses and as such provide a clear path for investment.

Please find attached our submission on the Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018, should you wish to discuss any aspect of this submission further please contact Mr Travis Sydes, Regional Coordinator – Natural Assets and Sustainability, FNQROC. [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

Darlene Irvine
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Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils