

20 March 2018

Committee Secretary,
State Development, Natural Resources and
Agricultural Committee
Parliament House
George St, BRISBANE 4000

e-mail: sdnraidc@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Sir or Madam,

Re: Submission on Vegetation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposal to introduce this new Bill. As a citizen of Australia I have a keen interest in our wildlife, and a strong belief that no native species should be allowed nowadays to decline towards extinction in the wild.

The existing legislation governing land clearing in Queensland (Qld) was apparently introduced several years ago to allow an escalation of clearing towards levels prevailing 25-30 years ago, when it was essentially uncontrolled. I understand that recent rates of clearing have reached about 300,000 ha per year, which is alarmingly high.

The condoning of increased rates of native vegetation destruction by any Queensland government in the present day is enormously irresponsible. It essentially gives a signal that the thousands of fascinating and beautiful animal and plant species that live in Queensland are worthless and can be destroyed continually. This even includes the koala, an "iconic" animal by any standard. Its populations are crashing in most places in eastern Australia mainly due to clearing for urban expansion and a lack of coherent plans to reverse this trend.

I understand that the primary objective of the proposed new Bill is "to reinstate responsible clearing laws". I appreciate that a total ban on clearing would be unrealistic, and further clearing for agriculture and housing (on a limited scale) may be justified. **Genuinely responsible and carefully considered legislation controlling land clearing is a worthy and vital objective that I think needs to be established as soon as possible in Queensland (our most biodiversity-rich State).** (And it is also needed in NSW.)

I suggest that responsible land-clearing legislation should include the following basic conditions listed below (as a minimum), with no implied order of importance - all are important.

- Use of "self-assessable codes" restricted to a very minor scale of clearing, such as for genuine routine agriculture management activities; codes not to be used for any broad-scale clearing.
- Prohibition generally on clearing of Endangered or Critically Endangered ecological communities (ECs); also, the types of ECs in *all* proposed clearing sites should be determined before permission to clear.

- Regrowth 20 or more years old should generally be treated as vegetation not permitted to be cleared at will, with clearing of such vegetation prohibited in the case of Endangered ECs.
- Prevention of clearing in important catchments of the Great Barrier Reef. The Federal Government does recognise that sediment runoff is one of the threats to the Reef; and a major sediment load is caused by poorly planned or careless vegetation destruction.
- Genuine efforts to ensure that each EC likely to be subject to clearing has an adequate and representative percentage (e.g. 25-30%) of its total area protected in *secure, permanent* reserves at a Queensland bioregional level, preferably before clearing is approved.
- Reliable fauna surveys in all proposed clearing areas. Any threatened species in these areas to be given *adequate, linked* refuges, of good quality uncleared habitat to (hopefully) survive in. (It may be difficult to determine properly what area is "adequate" for fauna refuge within cleared areas in such cases. This needs to be done by ecologists, NOT by clearing proponents.) This proposal does not remove or reduce the need for systematic reservation of ECs as in the point above.
- Undisturbed native vegetation buffer strips around or along lakes, rivers, creeks and wetlands. I suggest 100-200m wide buffers each side for major streams and around lakes and wetlands; 100m each side of smaller streams. These protection measures for water quality and aquatic biodiversity should be separate from fauna refuges (above). (That is, streamside buffer strips cannot be considered as adequate refuges in themselves, but could be used to link such refuges in some cases.)

It is vital that the vegetation legislation in the proposed Amendment Bill is adopted and will lead in practice to much better mangement and control of land-clearing in Queensland, by incorporating the natural environment protection measures suggested above, and hopefully others as well.

On the other hand, if the status quo is allowed to prevail, large swathes of the State are in great danger of becoming biological dead zones, with practically all of their rich biodiversity wiped out. That might suit a few industries but it would greatly impoverish the nation's heritage, leaving a very poor legacy for later generations.

Yours sincerely,

I. G. Johnson

I. G. JOHNSON