




Speech By  
**Hon. Leanne Enoch**

**MEMBER FOR ALGESTER**

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## **VEGETATION MANAGEMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Hon. LM ENOCH** (Algester—ALP) (Minister for Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, Minister for Science and Minister for the Arts) (12.30 pm): I rise to speak to the Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018. The Palaszczuk government went to the last state election with a clear commitment to end broadscale tree clearing in Queensland, and that is what we are doing here today. Queensland Labor has a long and proud track record on conservation, having first enacted vegetation management laws in 1999, but those opposite cannot say the same. On Tuesday, 21 May 2013, the then LNP government delivered a massive blow to Queensland's natural environment. On that day, the former Newman LNP government tore up Labor's sensible vegetation management laws and set in motion unprecedented rates of tree clearing in this state. It was a shameful act by a visionless government. On that day, the LNP turned back the clock on conservation, and the impact has been devastating.

The science shows that the annual rate of clearing of woody vegetation in Queensland has increased up to fourfold compared to 2010-11. That equates to around 1,000 football fields of vegetation being cleared in Queensland every day. According to the Statewide Landcover and Trees Study, almost 400,000 hectares of land was cleared in 2015-16 alone, and 40 per cent of that clearing occurred in Great Barrier Reef catchments. These excessive rates of tree clearing not only impact our landscape but also present a serious risk to our biodiversity and wildlife. Two plant species have become extinct in the wild because of land clearing, and 949 flora and fauna species are under threat.

At the 2015 election, the Labor Party made a commitment to Queenslanders to stop this damage. On 18 August 2016, the Palaszczuk government brought that commitment to the parliament. Members opposite had the opportunity to come into this place and set things right by voting for new laws. Did they respond to the overwhelming evidence that was mounting about the damaging impact of their laws? No, they did not. Instead, they allowed unsustainable rates of tree clearing to continue. The science shows that, if clearing remains at this rate, it will fragment landscapes and reduce habitat for native wildlife, increase sediment flows to the Great Barrier Reef and prevent Australia from meeting its international climate commitments. Today is a historic moment for the future of Queensland. Today we say to our children and our grandchildren that we care enough about your future to fight again for the protection of our environment.

One of the reasons this bill is so important is the protection it will provide to the Great Barrier Reef. It is important to remember that a key commitment to UNESCO to protect the reef's World Heritage status was to reduce riparian land clearing as part of the Reef 2050 Plan. Removing the riparian vegetation that holds riverbanks and stream channels together causes an increase of sediment pollution that washes out onto the reef. This bill will reinstate the protections that were in place for the reef by tightening the regulation on clearing of riparian vegetation and expanding it to cover all reef catchments. This amendment is critically important for the health of our reef.

The protection of essential habitat for near-threatened wildlife under the Vegetation Management Act 1999 was removed by the former LNP government, limiting the protection of habitat to only that of endangered and vulnerable wildlife. As a consequence of that removal, any clearing carried out under that act resulting in the clearing of habitat for near-threatened wildlife remained unregulated. Furthermore, this loss of habitat was unable to be counterbalanced with the requirement for an environmental offset for near-threatened wildlife. We know that habitat loss is the greatest risk to threatened species in Queensland. Therefore, this bill's reinstatement of essential habitat for near-threatened wildlife is absolutely necessary to ensure that the act once again provides the protection it once delivered.

In addition, the protection of remnant and high conservation value non-remnant vegetation that is included in the bill will further protect important habitat for threatened wildlife species. In 2015-16, 35 per cent of clearing occurred in remnant vegetation, which is structurally mature, supports biodiversity and reduces soil and water degradation. In introducing these protections, it is important to note that, as stated in the parliamentary committee's report, there are 23 million hectares of land covered by a category X exemption in PMAVs across the state. This means landholders can continue to clear these areas regardless of the value of the forest and bushland.

In its examination of this bill, the parliamentary committee has made a recommendation regarding the Cape York Peninsula Heritage Act 2007 which has been supported by the government. We support the investigation of options to assist in the establishment of Indigenous community use areas, or ICUAs, under the act. ICUAs can support Aboriginal landowners to realise sustainable development opportunities. The declaration of an ICUA allows for clearing on Aboriginal lands to provide an opportunity for increased Aboriginal economic participation. A review of how the process for declaring ICUAs can be improved is a welcome recommendation.

The changes proposed by this legislation are backed by science that has been expertly prepared by the Queensland Herbarium and, importantly, peer reviewed by the country's leading science body, the CSIRO. Much has been made of the science behind the SLATS report during consideration of this bill in recent weeks. It is important to note, therefore, that the recent 2015-16 SLATS report was reviewed externally by international experts at the Remote Sensing Research Unit of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research in South Africa. Again, the Queensland Herbarium's science is peer reviewed and it stacks up. SLATS has been peer reviewed many times over its period.

The government has acknowledged that there is room for improvement in the report, however. As the Minister for Natural Resources outlined in his introductory speech on this bill, our intention is that future SLATS reports will include increases in woody vegetation as well as clearing rates. It is important to remember, however, that many habitat values of remnant vegetation take decades to re-establish after clearing. Vegetation that has regrown over a few years simply does not match the biodiversity value of plants that have been in place for long periods of time. I believe that when we take action that is firmly grounded in science we achieve a beneficial outcome for all Queenslanders.

We can deliver economic growth in the agricultural industry and protect our state's most important ecosystems, particularly the Great Barrier Reef. Labor promised at the last election to end broadscale tree clearing in Queensland and that is what this legislation will do. I commend the bill to the House.