



114 Boundary Street
Railway Estate, Townsville
PO Box 364, Townsville
Qld, 4810
Ph: 61 07 47716226
[REDACTED]
office@nqcc.org.au
www.nqcc.org.au
ABN: 55 903 033 286

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Agriculture and Environment Committee
Parliament House
BRISBANE QLD 4000
vminquiry@parliament.qld.gov.au

To the Agriculture and Environment Parliamentary Committee,

**Re: Submission on Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other
Legislation Amendment Bill 2016**

The North Queensland Conservation Council (NQCC) is in support of this Bill. We thank the Committee for the opportunity to have our submission heard about why that is so.

NQCC is the regional conservation council for the area from Cardwell to Bowen, and from the Reef to the Northern Territory border. Established in 1974, it falls under the broad umbrella of the Queensland Conservation Council and focuses on education, advocacy and policy development.

We have three main concerns regarding the existing legislation which we believe provide solid reasons to back the proposed Amendment Bill. They are:

- The loss of habitat for vulnerable and endangered species
- The release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere from tree clearing and the impact on climate change
- The negative impact that land clearing has on the Great Barrier Reef and its catchments

1. Loss of habitat

We'd like to draw your attention to the work of Dr Martin Taylor, whose studies concluded that 40,312 hectares of koala habitat disappeared between 2012 and 2014¹ when the land clearing laws were weakened by the former Newman government. Koalas only became listed as vulnerable to extinction in August of

¹ <http://www.wwf.org.au/?15660/More-than-40000-hectares-of-koala-habitat-cleared>

2015.² Continued, unrestricted vegetation clearing is counter-productive to other policies to protect the species.

It isn't just koalas that are at risk. In fact, there are 200 species of threatened flora and fauna that lost 211,820 hectares of habitat.³ Species include the Northern Quoll, Greater Bilby, Mahogany Glider, Northern Bettong, the Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby, and the Red Goshawk.

Habitat loss and fragmentation is the primary cause of species decline,⁴ so we believe that in order to promote the conservation of our endangered native species, land clearing controls must be tightened.

2. Contributions to climate change

The work being done to curb emissions at the Federal level of government would be undermined by Queensland government if land clearing laws aren't amended. Keeping trees in the ground is important because plants store carbon dioxide. Known as "carbon sinks", keeping forests as they are can be an effective carbon offset.

A study by the Co-operative Research Centre for Greenhouse Accounting has estimated that Australian forests store about 10.5 billion tonnes of carbon (excluding soil carbon). This store of solid carbon has accumulated over an assumed life of 100 years for native eucalypt regrowth. That translates to our forests storing an amount of carbon equivalent to almost 38.5 billion tonnes of gaseous carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, about 70 times Australia's annual net greenhouse gas emission.⁵

However, it appears that the current land-clearing legislation doesn't recognise how lucrative carbon sequestration can be. Carbon pollution released by tree clearing in Queensland in 2013-14 was the equivalent of putting an extra 8 million cars on the road for a year.⁶ In just three years, the rate of clearing will create enough additional carbon dioxide emissions to cancel out emissions savings the government says it will make by paying farmers \$670 million to stop cutting down trees.⁷ In 2013-14 the extra pollution undid the work of carbon

² http://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publicspecies.pl?taxon_id=85104

³ <http://www.wwf.org.au/?15660/More-than-40000-hectares-of-koala-habitat-cleared>

⁴ http://www.wwf.org.au/our_work/saving_the_natural_world/wildlife_and_habitats/threats_to_species/loss_of_habitat/human_activities_cause_loss_of_habitat/

⁵ <http://www.chiefscientist.gov.au/2009/12/which-plants-store-more-carbon-in-australia-forests-or-grasses/>

⁶ <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/apr/19/the-effects-of-queenslands-land-clearing-are-devastating-nsw-must-not-follow>

⁷ <http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/feb/29/exclusive-land-clearing-surge-in-qld-set-to-wipe-out-direct-action-gains-report>

abatement and tree planting, from the Emissions Reduction Fund, worth hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars.

It's counterproductive to spend public funds to combat global warming and then allow the gains to be nullified by lax tree-clearing controls.⁸ NQCC supports this Bill because it supports efforts to reduce Queensland's carbon emissions by reinstating the nation-leading vegetation protection laws repealed by the previous government.

3. Threats to the Great Barrier Reef

The Great Barrier Reef is under dire threat with massive coral bleaching affecting 93% of the reef. Tourism in the Great Barrier Reef region contributes \$6 billion to our economy, so it's an environmental asset as well as an economic asset worth protecting. Tying in to our previous point, pollution from carbon dioxide is harming our Reef, but we'd like to focus on the more direct effects of land clearing on the Reef.

Bulldozing bushland damages the Reef by generating sediment pollution that can smother and kill corals and sea grass. If land is converted to crops, there is an added risk of chemical run-off pollution. According to the Queensland Auditor General, there was a 229% increase in tree clearing in reef catchments following the loosening of land-clearing laws. As with carbon pollution mentioned in the previous point, the tens of millions of taxpayer dollars being spent to reduce water pollution in the Reef lagoon is undermined by lax laws that allow clearing to escalate, eroding soils and making sediment pollution worse.⁹

We believe that some of the most important parts of the proposed legislation relate to restoring protections for trees next to riverbanks ('riparian areas') and extending provisions from some to all Great Barrier Reef catchments.

NQCC thanks you for the opportunity to make these comments and looks forward the passing of this legislation.

Yours sincerely,



Maree Dibella
Acting Coordinator

⁸ <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/apr/19/the-effects-of-queenslands-land-clearing-are-devastating-nsw-must-not-follow>

⁹ <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/apr/19/the-effects-of-queenslands-land-clearing-are-devastating-nsw-must-not-follow>