



Birds Queensland
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Research Director
Agriculture and Environment Committee
Parliament House
BRISBANE QLD 4000
Email vminquiry@parliament.qld.gov.au

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

Dear Mr Chair and Committee Members,

Birds Queensland welcomes the opportunity to comment on this Bill. Our aim is to promote the scientific study and conservation of birds with particular reference to the birds of Queensland, encompassing the protection of habitat. We represent almost 800 members.

Almost two-thirds (63%) of land in Australia has been modified for human use. Clearing of native vegetation continues to occur for many reasons including agriculture, plantation forestry, mining and urban development. Land clearing in Queensland is accelerating with the latest data confirming that 296,000 hectares of bushland was cleared in 2013-14 – three times as much as in 2008-09. Clearing in Queensland alone in 2013-14 was more than was cleared in the whole of Australia in 2008 (216,500 ha).

Land clearing destroys plants and local ecosystems, and removes the food and habitats on which native animals rely. In addition, land clearing helps weeds and invasive species to spread, affects greenhouse gas emissions and can lead to soil degradation, including erosion and/or salinity, which in turn can reduce water quality.

The removal of native vegetation is a major threat to Australia's environment and biodiversity. Many species of animal and plant are under threat not only due to land clearing and changes in the surrounding environment, but also because of invasive species which spoil their habitat. We recognise that clearing native vegetation for appropriate agricultural use can provide economic benefits that help meet the needs of a growing population. However the clearing of infertile marginal

land such as tropical savannah on Cape York cannot be considered as appropriate for high value agriculture.

The Commonwealth Government has committed hundreds of millions of dollars to improve water quality on the Great Barrier Reef. Yet ongoing land clearing in catchments that drain onto the Reef will reverse many of the gains these programs aim to achieve. The data show that clearing in catchments that drain onto the Great Barrier Reef constituted 35% of total clearing across Queensland in 2013-14. The loss of native vegetation cover in such regions is one of the major drivers of the deteriorating water quality on the Reef.

The Australian Government's Emissions Reduction Fund (ERF) is paying hundreds of millions of dollars to reduce carbon emissions from industry. But the carbon released from Queensland's land clearing in 2012-2014 alone is estimated at 63 million tonnes, far more than was purchased under the first round of the ERF.

Species cannot recover if their habitat is being destroyed faster than it is being restored. Land clearing on Cape York has destroyed habitat of four endangered bird species; namely the Gouldian Finch, the Golden Shouldered Parrot, the Red Goshawk and the Buff-breasted Buttonquail. Gouldian Finches are found elsewhere in Queensland but are very rare.

Birds Queensland strongly supports the proposed legislation as it:

1. Reduces the ability to obtain a permit to clear for High Value Agriculture. This is especially important in threatened habitat and habitat of endangered species and where large scale clearing is conducted on marginal land that is clearly not suited to High Value Agriculture.
2. Restores protections for ecologically important regrowing woodlands ('High Value Regrowth').
3. Restores protections for trees next to riverbanks ('riparian areas') and extends provisions from some to all Great Barrier Reef catchments.
4. Removes the defence of claimed mistaken clearing, and restores the starting presumption that a landholder is responsible for clearing that takes place on their property.
5. It deters "panic" clearing and applications.



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