



Australian Koala Foundation

The international organisation dedicated to saving the Koala and its habitat.

ACN 010 922 102

21 March 2018

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

Dear Committee,

Submission to Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018 (‘VMOLA Bill’) inquiry

On behalf of the Australian Koala Foundation (AKF) and Queensland Koalas I wish to make a submission to your Inquiry.

AKF firmly believes that without stronger habitat protection there is no hope of ever sustaining or increasing Queensland Koala numbers into the future, or, indeed, ever removing them from their current status as Vulnerable in Queensland under the Queensland Nature Conservation Act 1992 and Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Commonwealth). The VMOLA Bill is a crucial piece of legislation in AKF’s view.

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AKF also firmly believes that, because the VM Act fundamentally relies on the accuracy of underlying vegetation mapping, that the VMOLA Bill incorporates a requirement that the QLD Government allocates annual funds aimed specifically at improving vegetation mapping. Without accurate mapping it is impossible to make good land use decisions and it is our experience that many farmers feel the mapping is totally inadequate on their farms.

The AKF also wants to stress that if Remnant Ecosystems are listed as “Endangered” or “Of Concern” then they should be treated as such. They should have the protection that they warrant. Many of these Remnant Ecosystems are crucial for Koala survival and they just keep disappearing under current legislation and practices. This is not addressed by this Bill.

We wish to make the following comments

1. Removal of the ability to obtain permits for high value agriculture and high value irrigated agriculture. AKF believes that this process has been flawed from the beginning with no independent verification of permits or monitoring.
2. Reintroduction of the requirement to obtain Riverine Protection Permits to better regulate clearing in watercourses which are often the best habitats for Koalas especially in drier areas.
3. Extended protections of regrowth vegetation generally within the Koala’s geographic range which were not protected under the VM Act currently.

We generally support the following amendments, however it is essential that they are strengthened by our proposed amendments to truly reduce excessive clearing of wildlife habitat, impacts to the Great Barrier Reef and climate change emissions:

1. **Improved protection of ‘high value regrowth vegetation’**, being vegetation that has grown back well after being cleared. This is strongly supported – as far as we know Koalas don’t distinguish between Remnant and High Value Regrowth (HVR), and protection of HVR would certainly increase the area of available Koala habitat. The legislation needs to define HVR so that it aligns with and includes the Mature Regrowth dataset available from EHP.

‘High value regrowth vegetation’ must be protected, especially as it applies to Koalas, a Vulnerable species for the whole of the State.

2. AKF believes that ‘Thinning’ should include clearing up to a maximum of 25% of a regenerating forest (and never Remnant or High Value Regrowth/Mature Regrowth).
3. Leaving map amendment up to the land owner will leave significant areas of Queensland where clearing is unregulated. Mapping needs to be carried out by independent qualified professionals, e.g. botanists at the QLD Herbarium. **Good environmental decisions can’t be made with bad maps.**
4. **The Bill does not tighten excessive clearing allowed under fodder harvesting codes so amendments are needed.** Fodder harvesting should be limited to where there is an official drought declaration and again should be limited to no more than 25% of a forest or woodland.
5. **AKF does not believe that self-assessment for clearing purposes is acceptable under any circumstances.** This applies to nearly all of the previous points.

Yours sincerely,

Dave Mitchell

Landscape Ecologist

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