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EXCESSIVE TREE-CLEARING IN QUEENSLAND

We have a basic responsibility to protect Queensland's forests, woodland and wildlife ecosystems. These trees and plants provide vital homes for endangered native animals and plants, protect our waterways, topsoil, arrest salinity and desertification, provide homes for pollinators and absorb greenhouse gas pollution. Since basic protections were removed in 2013, excessive tree-clearing has driven wildlife closer to extinction, exposed rivers to increased sediment pollution, degraded farmland and increased greenhouse gas emissions. Clearing trees also contributes to declining rainfall and increased drought, with consequential impacts on farms and regional communities.

The simple truth is, tree-clearing in Queensland is out of control today, and safeguards are needed. Queensland has the highest rate of tree-clearing in Australia, and Australia has the highest rate of tree-clearing in the developed world. Australia also has the second largest rate of clearing for beef production in the world. Queensland is a globally recognised deforestation hotspot. For every tree planted at least six are being destroyed.

The previous tree-clearing laws in Queensland struck that balance, successfully controlling excessive tree-clearing without impacting on industry and the economy – indeed, the state economy grew at 5.4% in the last year that responsible protections were in-place¹. But this balanced approach was abandoned in 2012.

As a result, in 2014-15 alone, almost 300,000 hectares of forests and woodlands were cleared due to weakened controls. Modelling indicates that this released an additional 36 million tonnes of carbon into the atmosphere, while destroying the homes of many unique Australian species and doing other environmental harm. If we continue at the present rate, we will have permanently lost up to 1.3 million hectares of pristine bushland by 2021. This is the equivalent of bulldozing a seven kilometre wide path from Brisbane to Cairns.

We need laws that strike the right balance between the economy and the environment, which apply to everyone and all industries (including agriculture, mining and urban development).

Recommended policy:

- **Legislate to protect all remnant and high quality regrowth vegetation:** including wetlands, vegetation in and alongside watercourses ('streamside buffers'), vegetation on steep slopes, erosion hotspots and in the catchments of the Great Barrier Reef. The legislation should remove existing loopholes and apply to everyone and all industries (including agriculture, mining and urban development).

¹ <http://www.qgso.qld.gov.au/products/tables/economic-growth-ql-rest-aust-aust/index.php>

- **Legislate to increase the extent and quality of native vegetation across Queensland**, particularly to recover Great Barrier Reef water quality and regional ecosystems² and threatened species habitats. Clear and measurable vegetation extent, quality and connectivity targets should recover all threatened species and ecosystems so that they can be removed from the 'threatened list'.
- **Acquire existing approvals:** Acquire/buyout approvals issued between 2012 and 2017 to clear remnant and high quality regrowth vegetation.
- **Financial incentives for landholders to revegetate important areas:** Provide financial incentives to landholders to participate in revegetation programs that achieve the above targets, including by fostering biodiversity and carbon farming markets, as well as direct government paid incentives.
- **Support monitoring and compliance:** Ensure effective monitoring and enforcement of the law.

Costs:

- \$50 million/year for five years (\$250 million), a similar amount as that provided in New South Wales, to provide financial incentives for landholders to participate in programs to achieve the vegetation extent, quality and connectivity targets, and acquire approvals to clear remnant and high quality regrowth issued between the 2012 and 2017.

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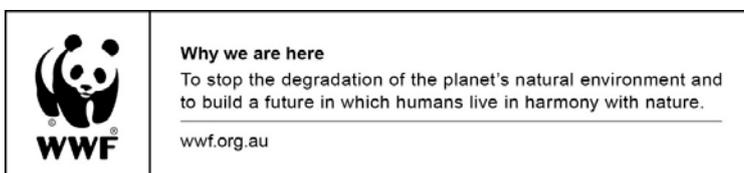
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WWF-Australia Briefing published in May 2017.



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² As mapped by the QLD Government Herbarium