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From: Lyndal Breen [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, 24 January 2023 10:01 AM
To: LLS Policy Mailbox
Subject: Submission on land clearing laws

Land clearing laws need to be strengthened. Existing bushland needs to be regarded as precious and not to be cleared without very good reasons, and full assessment of its values.

One area that needs greater protection is the habitat corridor. Many areas of good bushland are isolated, limiting their usefulness as habitat. There has been a strong effort to create connections between areas of good habitat and these often follow creeks and waterways - the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative is an example of such a program. Other connectivity may be in the form of "stepping stones" through otherwise cleared landscapes. Both farms, and urban areas, can have such stepping stones of a big tree here, an uncleared steep gully there, a rocky hilltop etc, that contains a clump of original vegetation. These corridors and stepping stones need to be mapped and protected as they provide the last refuges for many threatened species and vulnerable ecosystems.

Land clearing laws need to be significantly strengthened. In 2016, weakened vegetation clearing laws saw land clearance increase 13-fold, from an annual average rate of 2,703 ha per year under the old laws to 37,754 ha under the new laws. The use of self-assessable codes and biodiversity offsets have enabled this massive increase in large-scale clearing of vital habitats. Self-assessment is a nonsense. Few people have the expertise to adequately identify more than a few common native plants and highly skilled botanists and ecologists seem to be in short supply. Offsetting is also fraught with problems such as adequately identifying "like for like" areas, and ensuring that the values in off-set areas are well maintained. Both self-assessment and biodiversity offsetting need to be ended.

The Natural Resources Commission has questioned the integrity of the current regulatory system, noting that "compliance frameworks are inadequate." , and the Auditor General has given a negative assessment of the integrity of the biodiversity offset scheme.

The Discussion Paper released as part of the review of land clearing laws lacks serious consideration of the disastrous impacts of vegetation loss on biodiversity as well as water, soil and natural landscapes, let alone the value of areas of natural bushland as carbon sinks.

Land clearing laws require urgent reform. There needs to be greater transparency over land clearing data; clear limits on clearing; mandatory assessments for clearing proposals; adequate mapping; monitoring of impacts on salinity, soil and water; and tougher penalties for compliance; and funding for adequate enforcement.

Land clearing laws must be amended to protect native vegetation, native fauna, flora, ecosystems, water security, healthy soil, and natural landscapes.

Yours faithfully
Lyndal Breen

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