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The Qld Vegetation Management Framework

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Since 1999, vegetation management in Queensland has been regulated under the *Vegetation Management Act 1999* (VMA) and the *Planning Act 2016* and its predecessor Acts.

Over almost twenty years, the VMA has been part of the State's policy framework contributing to various land management outcomes by regulating clearing as established by the purpose of the VMA. This includes regulating clearing to:-

- Conserve remnant vegetation and regional ecosystems,
- Prevent land degradation,
- Prevent the loss of biodiversity and maintenance of ecological processes, and
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

In particular, the conservation of native vegetation facilitated by the VMA has been assessed by the Australian Greenhouse Office to have been critical to Australia achieving its commitment to reductions in carbon emissions under the Kyoto Protocol. In 2018, the Australian and Queensland Governments identified the VMA and its regulation of vegetation clearing within the catchments of the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) as key reasons the GBR should not be listed as endangered by the IUCN.

Overview of the framework

Queensland's vegetation management framework regulates the clearing of native woody vegetation, including trees and shrubs, but not non-woody plants such as grasses.

The framework, through the *Planning Act 2016* and the VMA, regulates the clearing of remnant vegetation. It also regulates the clearing of high value regrowth vegetation, and all native regrowth vegetation alongside watercourses in Great Barrier Reef catchments.

The framework uses land tenure and the Regulated Vegetation Management Map to determine how vegetation is regulated. Areas are shown on the Regulated Vegetation Management Map as either:

- Category A areas which are areas subject to greater clearing restrictions, including areas subject to offsets, voluntary declarations, compliance notices, as well as exchange areas.
- Category B areas which are remnant vegetation.
- Category C areas which are high-value regrowth vegetation.
- Category R areas which are regrowth watercourse and drainage feature areas in all Great Barrier Reef catchments; and
- Category X areas which are generally exempt from requiring approval to clear under the vegetation management framework.

The statewide 'regulated vegetation management map' shows the location of areas of vegetation in each category. Landholders may opt to obtain a 'Property Map of Assessable Vegetation' or PMAV, which shows vegetation categories at a property scale.

PMAVs are an important tool to show landholders where they can, or cannot clear, with areas denoted as 'Category X' being able to be cleared without restriction under the state's vegetation management laws.

The vegetation management framework allows clearing through the following pathways:

- Regulatory exemptions allow clearing without an approval or notification, which apply to a variety of routine and essential land management practices, and practices that are approved under other Acts;

- Accepted development (self-assessment) vegetation clearing codes and area management plans which provide for clearing to occur for lower impact activities. No approval is required; however, the landholder must comply with the requirements of the relevant code or plan. This includes a requirement to notify the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy (DNRME) before doing the clearing. Notifications are free and can be easily and quickly made on line, and clearing can commence as soon as the notification is made;
- A development approval is required for certain more significant clearing activities. In May 2018, the Queensland Government amended the framework largely to reinstate protections that were removed by the previous Government in 2013, as well as some additional enhancements based on the latest science.

Regardless of vegetation management laws, other Commonwealth, State and local government laws and planning scheme requirements may also apply to clearing vegetation.

The Queensland Government is committed to evidence based policy and will continue to evaluate legislation, policies or programs on the basis of the best available science. This is evidenced by the engagement of the Queensland Herbarium and the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) to contribute to the review of the Accepted Development Vegetation Clearing Codes, which were recently released in June 2019.

Those ADVCCs include clearing for the following purposes:

- Extractive industry
- Infrastructure
- Improve agricultural efficiency
- Managing encroachment
- Managing fodder harvesting
- Managing regulated regrowth
- Managing weeds
- Necessary environmental clearing.

The review of the code for native forest practice is still to be finalised.

DNRME recognises the need to be responsive to landholder queries regarding vegetation management issues. In 2018, the Department set up a Veg Hub call centre in Charleville with support from regional staff from across the State. The Veg Hub provided specialist advice to approximately 6,500 clients in 2018/19. In addition, regional vegetation management staff deal with many over the counter enquiries in regional centres and attended over 35 field days or workshops to meet face to face with landholders.

The implementation of the vegetation management framework has been supported over the period since 1999 by significant ongoing resourcing across the Queensland Government to ensure vegetation mapping represents the best available science and is updated to be contemporary. This has involved cooperative arrangements with both the Queensland Herbarium and the Queensland Remote Sensing Centre to deliver vegetation mapping and the Statewide Landcover and Trees Study (SLATS). The SLATS satellite imaging methodology provides the basis for the Department's Early Detection System, which evaluates changes in regulated vegetation facilitating timely compliance assessment and engagement with landholders.

In 2018, the Queensland Government made an additional commitment to undertake scientific enhancements to the Statewide Landcover and Trees Study (SLATS) and to establish a vegetation condition monitoring and mapping framework for the state. The program of work will build on the Government's investment in satellite imagery and computing technologies.

Call 135VEG (13 58 34)

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