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Native Vegetation Review  
Conservation Policy and Strategy Section  
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## SUBMISSION ON REVIEW OF NATIVE VEGETATION REGULATIONS

The Clarence Valley Conservation Coalition (CVCC) is a Grafton-based community group which has been involved with a wide variety of conservation issues in the Clarence Valley and beyond since its formation in 1988. As we live in the Macleay-Macpherson Overlap, an area significant for its biodiversity, we are particularly concerned about protection of our natural ecosystems and the threat to these from land clearing and inappropriate development.

- For many years now scientists have been warning governments and the community about the threat to biodiversity resulting from land clearing. Biodiversity can be impacted by -
  - a) broad scale clearing
  - b) clearing of smaller tracts of natural vegetation over a period of time leading to a cumulative impact
  - c) clearing leading to a loss of connectivity between areas of native vegetation.
- While the *Native Vegetation Act 2003* and the existing Regulations are far from perfect, they have stabilised the rate of clearing of native vegetation in the state. They have provided a basis which should be built on to ensure that the native vegetation of the state is protected for future generations. We cannot afford to keep decimating the natural ecosystems of our state. **The CVCC believes that the Regulations should be a strengthened rather than weakened as they will be under the proposed changes.**
- The proposed weakening of the regulations ignores the fact that maintaining and protecting native vegetation, as well as being essential for healthy ecosystems (and the survival of native flora and fauna such as the koala) provides a number of very important services which are important to humanity and to the economy. These include enhancement of agricultural systems, soil conservation, and protection of water quality (including salinity control, isolation of acid-sulfate soils, and mitigation of the severity of flood events in upper catchments).

- Some examples of the weakening of the regulations which are of concern to the CVCC are:
  - a) allowing for up to 10 ha to be included for additional clearing within the life of a PVP without offsets.
  - b) allowing ecological burning to occur as a Routine Agricultural Management Activity
  - c) allowing clearing of invasive native species and thinning of native vegetation without advice and approval from Catchment Management Authorities.
- As part of its commitment to reducing its greenhouse emissions Australia agreed to reduce land clearing. Obviously all Australian states should be cooperating in order to fulfil the national obligations. Indeed, it is in the interests of the entire community, as well as in the interests of future generations, that this happens. Weakening of the regulations sends the wrong message to the community and is likely to lead to further large scale unsustainable clearing, increased flora and fauna extinctions and widespread degradation of large areas.
- The CVCC believes that, as well as strengthening the regulations, the Government should move to a system where landowners are given compensation or stewardship payments for protecting native vegetation on their land. We understand that such a system has been in operation in South Australia since the late 1980s and that it has removed the acrimony from the debate about protection of native vegetation. Obviously, when landholders are given an incentive to protect native vegetation, the outcome is likely to be positive. Why is the NSW Government not taking this approach – or even instituting a trial of this approach ?

In conclusion, the CVCC urges the Government to strengthen the regulations and in addition, to institute a system of compensation or stewardship payments to landholders for protection of native vegetation.

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Hon. Secretary