



VALLEY WATCH Inc.

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Biodiversity Legislation Review,
PO Box A290,
Sydney South NSW 1232

RE PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE NATIVE VEGETATION ACT

Valley Watch Inc is a local not for profit organisation which has been operating in the Lower Clarence Valley of NSW for the past 22 years. Our members have continually been advocating for a healthy and biologically diverse environment that preserves the quality of life for all within the Clarence Valley and are therefore committed to promoting the highest standards of environmental sustainability across NSW.

The natural diversity of New South Wales has been severely diminished by land clearing, development, over-exploitation of natural resources and introduction of invasive species. *The Native Vegetation Act 2003* has played a critical role in reducing the loss of native vegetation in NSW and the *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995* has been crucial in identifying and addressing threats to biodiversity.

The NSW Government recognises its responsibility to protect the natural environment in the current State Plan, NSW 2021, in which it commits “to protect high value conservation land, native vegetation and biodiversity” .

Removing or weakening the protections provided by these Native Vegetation Acts will accelerate biodiversity loss in NSW. Decisions must be based on objective, science-based decision making criteria, such as the Environment Outcomes Assessment Methodology included under the Native Vegetation Act and any discretionary decision making should be very limited.

The future health of our natural environment depends on consideration of cumulative impact on native flora or fauna in assessing clearing and development proposals. Elements such as the ‘like for like’ offsetting principle must not be weakened and offsets must be fully protected in perpetuity.

Land clearing laws that have protected native vegetation have made an important contribution to greenhouse gas abatement efforts and these gains must not be lost, yet recent

amendments to regulations under the Rural Fires Act enable habitat removal whether or not the habitat is important to threatened species

If bilateral assessment and approval agreements are to be established under the *Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, then NSW biodiversity protection laws must meet Australia's obligations under the various international treaties to which Australia is a signatory, including the *Convention on Biological Diversity*, the *Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna*, and the *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*.

If the NSW Government is serious about protecting high value conservation land, native vegetation and biodiversity, our existing laws must be maintained and strengthened.

Yours sincerely

Gillian Lowbridge
Secretary
Valley Watch Inc