

Queensland's deforestation crisis: 1.2 million hectares of native forests and woodlands cleared since Liberal Campbell Newman government elected 2012

Background: The Vegetation Management Act 1999 (VMA) put some blocks on broadscale land clearing. It was strengthened to prohibit broadscale clearing between 2004-6. High value regrowth protection was added in 2009.

In 2012-3 the Liberal Newman government broke 2012 election promises not to weaken these laws. It reduced enforcement, added permits for so-called (irrigated) high value agriculture that reallo w broadscale clearing for grazing and de-protects high value regrowth.

The Newman government released no clearing data between 2012-16. Labor's Palaszczuk government has released two reports for 4 sets of data showing how dramatic the rise in clearing has been. Since 2012 1.2 million ha were cleared. Data for 2015-16 data show 395,000 ha cleared, a 33% increase on the previous year). 40% was in Great Barrier Reef catchments, a 45% increase on the previous year.

Labor introduced a Bill in 2016 to restore the VMA as it had been, but being a minority government, it had little juggling capacity or prospect of passing the Bill and it was defeated.

In 2017 the Palaszczuk government won the election on a clear platform with commitments for much stronger clearing laws.

It introduced a Bill in March to remove (irrigated) high value agriculture, re-protect high value regrowth under better definition, thinning as self-assessment based clearing, phase out of Area Management Plans, and place minor restrictions on fodder harvesting.

In April 2018 the Bill was referred to a Committee for Inquiry with about 14,000 submissions, most of which are expected to support the bill. The Committee Inquiry report on the Bill is due on April 23.