

Hon Leeanne Enoch  
Minister for Environment and the Great Barrier Reef  
GPO Box 5078  
BRISBANE QLD 4001



8 February 2018

Dear Minister,

The Bimblebox Alliance Inc (TBA) welcomes a second term for the Palaszczuk government, and we congratulate you on overseeing such key government sectors, as Minister for Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, and Minister for Science.

TBA was founded three and a half years ago with the objective of conserving and protecting the natural values of Bimblebox Nature Refuge and other Private Protected Areas (PPAs). With Clive Palmer's Galilee Coal Project now holding all the preliminary State and Federal approvals, Bimblebox needs protection, as do many other Nature Refuges and 'Protected' Areas. The promise of protection 'in perpetuity' has to be just that, rather than a disingenuous intent up to the point when a more lucrative proposition presents itself.

We are aware that the second reading of the Special Wildlife Reserve Bill was thwarted by the announcement of the state election back in November. We look forward to its re-introduction, but would urge some re-assessment beforehand. All Protected Areas of higher conservation value need to be more effectively safeguarded from land-use conflict, particularly when extractive industries are involved. There is great need for a raised profile within decision-making processes of the importance of Australia's extraordinary biodiversity.

Bimblebox stands like a beacon of conservation in the Desert Uplands bioregion which has been heavily cleared for grazing since the 1980s. Ten years ago, if I wanted to fulfil one of the conditions of our Nature Refuge Agreement – to maintain and enhance biodiversity – I had to be proactive in preventing the annihilation of Bimblebox by Waratah Coal's Galilee Project in the southern Galilee Basin.

During the last decade, much-needed conservation work on the Refuge was set aside as our time and efforts went into defending its boundaries from exploratory drills. Our pleas to successive governments were to no avail, and it is with renewed hope that I ask for exploration and mining to be prohibited in all Nature Refuges.

I am often reminded of a letter published in the Courier Mail during the Newman era, from Mr Ian Fairweather of Bardonia, under the heading 'Nature reserve must be retained'.

*The question of the Bimblebox Nature Reserve is more than the future of a few rare bird species, it is about trust.*

*The government website concerning nature refuges states unambiguously that the agreement is perpetual on freehold land, attached to the title and binds successive owners. On leasehold land it is for the duration of the lease and binds successive lessees.*

*There is a further statement that the Nature Conservation Act 1992 does make provisions for changes to the agreed conditions through negotiation with the state, as long as the nature refuge values are retained.*

*It will take a very fertile mind to conjure up a scenario of how wholesale open-cut mining will enable the nature refuge values to be retained.*

*I realise that the LNP was not the Government when this Bimblebox Nature Reserve was established, but the agreement was with the state, which I understand is not the Government.*

*So it seems to me if the public is to retain any trust in the governments of Queensland, those now in power must honour the terms of the agreement made for the state of Queensland by another government.*

A crucial issue for what remains of the native vegetation in Queensland is the moratorium on land clearing that was promised but could not be delivered during your government's first term. Last year's SLATS revealed that 395,000 hectares of regrowth and old growth vegetation were cleared in 2015-16. A knee-jerk reaction by grazing interests was to be expected, and therefore totally preventable. It happens every time legislation on land clearing threatens to be approved. (The only time it didn't was when Campbell Newman's government was in power.) Perhaps bureaucrats do not realise that the time between the announcement of a policy and the passing of legislation is crucial. Many graziers would not clear unless they felt that they must act while they can. Your government must prevent a repeat of such a catastrophic level of clearing. We strongly advise you to impose an immediate moratorium on clearing until such time that a revised Vegetation Management Bill becomes law.

TBA has other concerns about several areas of contention that present to government in a period of transition.

Wildlife and vegetation resilience in an era of climate breakdown renders genuinely protected areas of ever greater importance. Yet Bimblebox is threatened by a continuation of the very thing that brought about the breakdown, namely unbridled fossil fuel development. The unpopularity of Adani's Carmichael mine among Queenslanders stems in part from their appreciation of the fact that Australia's carbon emissions must be pegged back substantially (regardless of where coal or gas exports will be consumed). This continent's vast potential for renewable energy generation makes the development of the Galilee inexcusable. Only effective and rapid emissions reduction can mitigate the decline of the Great Barrier Reef.

The 'strict regulatory framework' for mining approvals that is often talked about is in great need of reappraisal twenty years after it was drafted. Australia has acquired responsibilities under the Paris Climate Conference Agreement; there has been volatility in commodities markets, coal in particular; environmental impact assessment and modelling is too simplistic; and the Australian public appear to have a better grasp of the urgent need for climate policy than either the federal or state governments. In addition, they insist that the protection of the natural world, our intergenerational legacy, no longer automatically plays second fiddle to economic growth in the here and now. This is why I signed this open letter to your government:

[https://www.wilderness.org.au/campaigns/time-solutions-work?utm\\_source=breaking\\_news&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=new\\_laws&utm\\_content=link1](https://www.wilderness.org.au/campaigns/time-solutions-work?utm_source=breaking_news&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=new_laws&utm_content=link1)

In 2013, the Land Court heard objections to the neighbouring Alpha Coal Project, and Member Smith upheld concerns regarding groundwater impacts. He recognised groundwater as an indispensable asset for the only viable industry in arid Central West Queensland, grazing. He recommended that the precautionary principle be exercised in the absence of complete knowledge of the region's hydrogeology. Vast quantities of water are predicted to be consumed by all the Galilee mines proposed, including Adani's. The compromising of the Great Artesian Basin will have catastrophic impacts.

Finally, I have previously expressed my frustration at not being able to freely interact with other Nature Refuge owners in Queensland, and members of the public, due to your privacy rules. We believe these rules are stifling constructive dialogue, and have requested that there be greater openness so that we can share knowledge and experiences of conservation that we have in common. Far too often, Nature Refuge owners who battle daily with weeding, control of ferals, boundary and fencing maintenance, trail grading and fire management, are left isolated and struggling. We would therefore request that the Department emails all NRs, alerting them to TBA's focus and our contact details in case they would like to get in touch with us. This method was successfully used in Tasmania: those private reserve landowners who wished to confer were able to do so, and now benefit from the meeting of minds and sharing of information.

We would relish the opportunity to discuss all these matters with you further. As a Nunukul/Nughi woman, you more than most will appreciate the impact of the threat to the land of those appointed specifically to be guardians of its intrinsic value.

We wish you great success in your new role.

With kind regards



Paola Cassoni

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