Native Vegetation Clearing Response

The Queensland Government reponse to the Native Vegetation Scientific Expert Panel Report

Toward a more harmonised approach to sustainable vegetation management in Queensland

September 2023

Queensland
Government

Acknowledgement of Country

The Queensland Government acknowledges the Country and people of Queensland's First Nations. We pay our respect to Elders past and present.

We acknowledge and thank First Nations people for the enduring relationship connecting people, Country, and ancestors—an unbreakable bond that has safely stewarded and protected the land, waters, and sky for thousands of generations.

We acknowledge the deep relationship, connection and responsibility to land, sea, and sky Country as an integral element of First Nations peoples' identity and culture.

Minister's foreword

Queensland's native vegetation is a vital asset to our economy—supporting human wellbeing, providing essential habitat for our rich biodiversity, cost-effective solutions to address climate change, and a strong foundation for our tourism, natural resources, and agricultural industries to thrive.

Given the value forests provide to our society, the Queensland Government continually monitors changes to the extent and attributes of woody vegetation. While I am pleased to report that the most recent 2020–21 monitoring has shown a 49 per cent decrease in clearing since 2018–19, in 2018–19, this monitoring detected that an area of 680,000 hectares of native vegetation had been impacted by clearing activities.

The Palaszczuk Government urgently appointed the then Queensland Chief Scientist, Professor Hugh Possingham, to lead an independent review into factors behind the clearing data, and to identify pathways to better protect, restore and manage native vegetation in the future.

The Native Vegetation Scientific Expert Panel (the Panel) conducted the review and has delivered its recommendations to government. The *Native Vegetation Scientific Expert Panel Report* (the Panel Report) recognises the rigorous science underpinning Queensland's programs and policies and finds that the government's approach to sustainably managing native vegetation is fundamentally robust. It does however identify some opportunities for improvement.

The Panel Report provides ten recommendations to enhance the implementation of the existing vegetation management framework and further support landholders to seize the emerging economic opportunities of the national carbon and nature repair markets, Queensland Land Restoration Fund, and other programs. This can be achieved by delivering improved extension services, business support tools, education, and outreach to landholders.

I thank the Panel for their findings and considered recommendations and support their adoption by the Queensland Government. Despite the significant reduction in clearing activity since the Panel Report was commissioned, and the adoption of a number of measures aligned with the Panel's recommendations during the intervening period, the Queensland Government acknowledges that further work is required in collaboration with land managers and land sector industries to achieve our shared aspirations. I also recognise that implementing some recommendations will require further consultation and research prior to delivery.

The Panel Report sets out a promising path forward toward a more harmonised approach to native vegetation management that better engages, incentivises, recognises and rewards people for their actions to conserve Queensland's native vegetation and wildlife habitat on their properties.

Delivery of the Response is already underway through programs across government which are harnessing the strengths of our partnerships with landholders and seeking to co-design solutions with industry. These include the Department of Environment and Science's recently announced $50 million third investment round of the Land Restoration Fund; $2.3 million offered in funding since 2021 for the Carbon Farming Advice Scheme; $9.8 million over four years provided in the 2023-24 Budget for an enhanced compliance program, supporting landholders to understand the requirements of the vegetation management framework; and delivery of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries' *Queensland Low Emissions Agriculture Roadmap 2022–2032*, which was co-designed with industry.

Recognising that habitat loss is one of the greatest threats to biodiversity, implementation of the Queensland Government's response to further reduce native vegetation clearing will support delivery of commitments under *Conserving Nature: A Biodiversity Strategy for Queensland*.

Landholders' enduring expertise and contributions to native vegetation management in Queensland is highly valued. All Queenslanders benefit from the land stewardship services that our farmers, First Nations peoples and natural resource managers provide for society, by conserving habitat on their land and actively managing native vegetation from the risks of fire and invasive species.

The Queensland Government will continue to support landholders in the shared responsibility of stewarding our unique biodiversity, and our land sector industries as they respond to emerging global demands for sustainable and deforestation-free products. Working hand-in-hand with land managers to achieve long-term sustainable outcomes will accelerate progress toward our state's emissions reduction and protected area targets and enhance the resilience of our regional economies into the future.

Hon. Leanne Linard MP
Minister for the Environment and the Great Barrier Reef
Minister for Science and Multicultural Affairs

September 2023

Overview

The Native Vegetation Scientific Expert Panel's (the Panel) recommendations represent a pathway towards a more holistic and cohesive future for the Queensland land management sector that recognises, rewards, and incentivises improvements for a more sustainable approach to vegetation management.

The Queensland Government acknowledges and supports the need for an improved way of working with Queensland's land managers to deliver novel solutions to avoid native vegetation clearing. It also recognises that these solutions can enhance the sustainable profitability of Queensland's agricultural businesses and regions. To achieve this, the Queensland Government agrees to adopt the Panel's suggested overarching strategic vison for native vegetation management in Queensland based on the key principles of *engage, inform, and incentivise and reward*.

The Panel's recommendations aim to improve and support the management of native vegetation, without any changes to a landholder's ability to clear native vegetation mapped as Category X on a Property Map of Assessable Vegetation (PMAV). At the core of the Panel's recommendations is the important role for enhanced educational, financial, and motivational measures to further encourage landholders to go beyond their existing regulatory requirements and realise the tangible financial benefits of nature positive and low-emissions trade growth.

Emerging carbon and natural capital markets will play a pivotal role in enabling this transition, by providing financially rewarding incentives for the adoption of more sustainable land management practices, including protecting, retaining, and restoring native vegetation.

The Panel was formed in March 2022 following the release of the Queensland Government's Department of Environment and Science's (DES) 2018–19 State-wide Landcover and Trees Study (SLATS) report in December 2021, which showed that about 680,000 hectares of woody vegetation across Queensland had been impacted by full or partial clearing activities.

Given the adverse impacts of high native vegetation clearing rates on communities, industries, and Queensland's environment the Queensland Government acted swifty to investigate this clearing and identify the need for further action.

The Panel's year-long review included extensive consultation with both public and industry sectors and used the best available science to analyse the drivers, behaviours, and causal factors of clearing. It also included an evaluation of existing policy measures for managing native vegetation and consideration of a broad suite of potential options to further incentivise a reduction in clearing rates.

The Panel proposed ten specific actions that the Queensland Government will work to implement. All recommendations are accepted in full, with the exception of launching an environmental stewardship program, reviewing exemptions, and establishing an expert advisory committee, which the government accepts in principle. This supports the Panel's suggestions that delivering some of the recommendations will require more detailed policy analysis and careful monitoring over time, to ensure these interventions meet the three ecological objectives of protecting, restoring, and maintaining the condition of Queensland's ecosystems.

What we are already doing

While the Panel conducted its review, the Queensland Government continued to deliver and improve its existing native vegetation conservation measures. This included:

1. Supporting the expansion of landscape restoration and carbon farming projects across Queensland through the delivery of the number one ranked carbon market scheme in the country, the $500 million Land Restoration Fund (LRF), which leverages the national carbon market to provide stable, competitive income streams for landholders, farmers, and First Nations peoples.

2. Supporting Queensland landholders to seek expert advice on the viability of establishing a carbon farming project on their land through $2.3 million in funding offered for the Carbon Farming Advice Scheme (CFAS), which provides up to $10,000 towards the costs of carbon farming advice received from a LRF approved adviser.

3. Implementation of *Queensland's Protected Area Strategy 2020–2030* which has been supported by a record $262.5 million investment to grow the state's protected areas and improve the sustainable management of the protected area estate.

4. Implementation of the *South East Queensland Koala Conservation Strategy 2020–2025*, including the publication of a Consultation Post-implementation Review on Queensland's strong koala planning regulations, and updates to ensure that delivery of state infrastructure projects contribute to koala habitat conservation in South East Queensland.

5. Administration of the *Vegetation Management Act 1999* (VMA), which delivers a fair and balanced approach toward native vegetation management in Queensland. This includes accepted development vegetation clearing codes that provide for low ecological risk clearing, of which eight were recently reviewed based on the best available science.

6. Ongoing delivery of the annual SLATS to monitor and report changes in woody vegetation extent in Queensland, and the ongoing publication of SLATS data analysis relevant to the vegetation management framework.

7. Co-designing the *Queensland Low Emissions Agriculture Roadmap 2022–2032* in partnership with industry, which will further support landholders to transition toward low-emissions practices, including adopting carbon farming and economically sustainable landscape management opportunities.

8. Signed a Memorandum of Understanding that committed Queensland to working with the Australian Government to develop an approach to improve the strategic identification and protection of biodiversity through bioregional planning.

9. Reviewing the *Managing a native forest practice Accepted Development Vegetation Clearing Code* (ADVCC), considering the views of the Native Timber Advisory Panel.

10. Delivering the *Native Timber Action Plan*, including commitments to transfer up to 20,000 hectares of State Forest into the protected area estate by the end of 2024 and to end state-owned native timber harvesting in the South East Queensland Regional Plan area (south of Noosa) by the end of 2024.

Case study: Carbon farming opportunities for industry

Existing projects such as Beef and Conservation for the Future (BC4) at Goondicum Station in Central Queensland demonstrate how environmental markets can be leveraged to better protect, restore, and manage native vegetation in agricultural production systems for multiple benefits.

Goondicum Station owners Rob and Nadia Campbell are generating income from carbon credits issued under the Australian Government's Emissions Reduction Fund. Credits are generated through carbon farming methods involving restoration of parts of the property where vegetation was previously cleared, and through adoption of alternative cattle herd management techniques that alter the timing and extent of grazing to allow native pastures to regenerate and seed.

Goondicum has a contract to sell a percentage of its credits to the Queensland Government's Land Restoration Fund (LRF). The LRF pays a premium for credits from carbon projects like Goondicum that deliver environmental and social benefits, including benefits to First nations peoples, in addition to storing carbon. The LRF requires these co-benefits to be verified for example through the Accounting for Nature® Framework, to ensure these projects deliver genuine outcomes for communities.

Leveraging the carbon market to deliver the right balance between grazing and regenerative agriculture has allowed Goondicum to increase their agricultural profitability.

Lower stocking rates, reduced vegetation clearing, and pasture spelling is allowing reduced stress on the land overall, and has led to improvements in the nutritional quality of feed grasses. Goondicum Station now has healthier cattle and native grass pastures and soils, demonstrating the important role that native grasses and forests play in the production of high-quality beef.

With the income generated from carbon credits, the Campbells are continuing to re-invest in wildlife conservation and habitat restoration on their property. University students regularly visit the station to observe and study the local wildlife. Learnings from their approach are shared with other landholders to demonstrate how investment into natural capital can improve on-farm profitability while delivering positive ecological outcomes.

In addition to Accounting for Nature, Goondicum works with carbon proponent and key partner GreenCollar.

This example shows the possibilities that environmental markets and collaborative partnerships are already facilitating to encourage more sustainable landscape management in Queensland.

Case study: Cattle and conservation on Artemis Antbed Parrot Nature Refuge

Artemis Antbed Parrot Nature Refuge, situated in the southern part of Cape York Peninsula, is an intergenerational grazing property and home to the endangered golden-shouldered parrot.

Through the Private Protected Area Program's NatureAssist grant program, the landholders, Tom and Sue Shephard, were able to protect an additional 103,059 hectares of their property. Grant funding is being directed towards integrated land management activities to protect the golden-shouldered parrots and their habitat, whilst maintaining the cattle production enterprise and restoring native vegetation.

Sue and Tom Shephard say, "Our thing has always been to look after the country. We've lived on Artemis for most of our lives and we know it and care for it deeply. We've always tried to do things right so our cattle business is viable, but we're also looking after the golden-shouldered parrot and other wildlife. So, we're very happy and grateful to the Queensland Government for the chance to extend our conservation work."

The NatureAssist funding is being used to restore native grasslands and create the ideal habitat for the golden-shouldered parrot. In addition, the funding will be used for fencing to assist with spelling the land, reducing grazing pressures, and enabling the grassland and open woodlands to regenerate.

Supporting First Nations peoples connections to Country

The Queensland Government acknowledges the unique and ongoing connection of First Nations Queenslanders to land, wind, waters, and biodiversity. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples maintain a distinctive cultural, spiritual and physical relationship with Country, and have recognised legal rights and interests in land and sea.

The Queensland Government response (the Response) to the Native Vegetation Scientific Expert Panel does not restrict the rights of First Nations peoples to make decisions on their land. The Response includes actions that will support First Nations peoples' economic opportunities from their connection to Country. This includes improved landholder engagement services for all Queenslanders, including First Nations landholders and native title holders, encouraging greater awareness of the economic opportunities provided through stewardship programs and environmental markets to enhance protection, restoration, and management of native vegetation on land.

For First Nations peoples, there are ongoing economic opportunities in environmental markets to implement traditional knowledge of land and landscape management, such as cool savanna burning methods that sequester carbon and minimise impacts on biodiversity. For example, the $500 million Queensland Land Restoration Fund supports these opportunities by providing a premium payment for carbon farming projects that also deliver meaningful First Nations co-benefits.

The Response supports the Queensland Government's Statement of Commitment to Reframe the Relationship, by promoting the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to foster a material economic relationship with their land and culture, including through enabling joint management, restoration and savanna burning opportunities. The Department of Environment and Science, through the Gurra Gurra framework 2020–26, is committed to working in genuine partnership with First Nations Queenslanders to achieve stronger outcomes for Country and people.

The Panel's recommended actions

The Panel Report details the findings of an independent review of the drivers and behavioural factors behind the native vegetation clearing and re-clearing identified in the Department of Environment and Science's 2018–19 SLATS report (released on 30 December 2021).

The Panel investigated the drivers contributing to clearing and re-clearing in Queensland and identified pathways to protect, restore and manage native vegetation for multiple benefits, including outcomes for biodiversity conservation, emissions reduction, and socio-economic resilience.

The Panel Report focuses on two overarching objectives:

1. To maintain a stable, ecologically robust regulatory framework that provides security and confidence to landholders and the general public.

2. To implement a suite of educational, financial, and motivational measures that will further advance the ecological objectives and be consistently applied over a minimum of 15 years.

To achieve these objectives, the Panel provided ten recommendations designed to improve the implementation of the *Vegetation Management Act 1999*, support the protection and recovery of biodiversity, and assist landholders and regional communities to become more economically and socially resilient through the adoption of more sustainable vegetation management practices. These recommendations are described in full in the *Native Vegetation Scientific Expert Panel Report*, and are summarised in Table 1.

Enhanced satellite imagery, like this collected over Charleville, is used in the annual Queensland Government Statewide Landcover and Trees Study (SLATS), which maps the location and extent and change in woody vegetation across Queensland (Mulga Lands bioregion).

Table 1: Panel recommendations

R1: Maintain regulatory stability	Maintain current settings for regulating Category X land covered by a Property Map of Assessable Vegetation (PMAV), to provide certainty to landholders that will reduce volatility in clearing levels. The current system requiring landholder consent to change vegetation mapping on a PMAV remains appropriate and provides consistency. In addition, monitor the environmental and other impacts of the recently reviewed accepted development vegetation clearing codes (ADVCCs) over an extended period.
R2: Improve extension, education, and demonstration	Fund and support an improved extension service to landholders, focusing on consultation, engagement, and information on ways landholders can enhance biodiversity while maintaining or improving agricultural productivity and profitability. This should ideally be locally based and provide support for landholders to easily identify opportunities to protect, restore and manage native vegetation while generating on-farm income, including through accessing environmental markets and relevant government programs.
R3: Launch an environmental stewardship scheme	Design and establish a voluntary land stewardship program that raises awareness of the benefits of, and rewards landholders for, integrating biodiversity into land management/farming systems. Offering a range of options is considered important to meet the variable circumstances and priorities of different landholders, ranging from low-obligation to higher-obligation programs that emphasise active landholder engagement.
R4: Enhance carbon market opportunities	Encourage the Australian Government to develop new methods under the Emissions Reduction Fund for avoidance of clearing of regrowth on Category X land that is at high risk of being re-cleared and extend crediting periods for high integrity projects. Focus delivery of the Land Restoration Fund on longer-term projects that protect and restore areas of high conservation significance that have previously been cleared and ensure payments options are competitive relative to alternative productive land uses.
R5: Clearer reporting and communication of SLATS	Release annual standardised and carefully interpreted SLATS report cards that include clear explanations and data breakdowns to show the full balance sheet of native vegetation clearing, re-clearing and regrowth accounted for. This includes reporting on the reasons why clearing is occurring, through a vegetation management analysis of data. A fixed release date is recommended to provide transparency and confidence.
R6: Enable better enforcement	Increase funding and resources to the Department of Resources to improve the enforcement of the Vegetation Management Framework and allow for improved and increased early detection, engagement, and intervention.
R7: Better regional planning in fragmented bioregions	Consider further, finer-scale regional planning to understand and plan for current and emerging threats and opportunities to native vegetation from urban development, infrastructure, energy, and mining projects. The Panel notes Endangered and Of Concern regional ecosystems and areas that provide habitat for threatened species, particularly in South East Queensland, the Wet Tropics, and the Brigalow Belt bioregions as focus areas.
R8: Review exemptions for clearing in threatened ecosystems	Review exemptions under the Vegetation Management Framework for urban development, infrastructure, and resource activities (including Priority Development Areas), to ensure that impacts to Endangered and Of Concern regional ecosystems and habitat for threatened species is ideally avoided, or otherwise assessed under State Code 16: Native Vegetation Clearing.
R9: Review forestry in threatened ecosystems	Review private native forestry practices that result in full and partial clearing in Endangered and Of Concern regional ecosystems, and areas that provide habitat for threatened species, to identify appropriate measures to minimise and, ideally, avoid such clearing.
R10: Establish a standing expert advisory committee	Form a standing expert advisory committee that meets periodically to investigate and advise on issues of native vegetation management in the state and help progress the recommendations of this review.

Principles underpinning the Panel's recommendations

The Panel details three ecological objectives that underpin their recommendations:

1 **Protection**
Reducing the loss and risk of loss, of intact and vulnerable native vegetation ecosystems, particularly Endangered and Of Concern regional ecosystems, through imposition of long-term restrictions on land use and land-use change. Restrictions should seek to eliminate as far as possible the clearing of remnant vegetation and prevent any more regional ecosystems becoming threatened due to clearing or re-clearing.

This is achieved by:
- incentivising the retention of regrowth vegetation, particularly Endangered and Of Concern regional ecosystems
- identifying, protecting and maintaining old-growth vegetation, as many of its critically important habitat components (such as large old trees, natural hollows, and intact ground layer structure) are essential, irreplaceable once lost
- preventing the loss and degradation of all remaining examples of native vegetation with an intact, native ground layer
- protecting remnant and high value regrowth vegetation to prevent land degradation, enhance biodiversity and provide wildlife habitat (especially for threatened species) while sequestering carbon, and improving agricultural productivity and profitability.

2 **Restoration**
Restoring ecosystems that have been lost because of past clearing by incentivising regeneration and replanting of Endangered and Of Concern regional ecosystems and incentivising the regeneration or replanting of native vegetation in strategic locations to protect soil, watercourses and provide wildlife habitat (especially for threatened species), where outcomes such as carbon sequestration and improved agricultural productivity and profitability can be achieved.

3 **Management**
Improving the condition of areas of remnant and regrowth vegetation by incentivising improved management practices for biodiversity conservation and environmental outcomes.

The Queensland Government acknowledges the Panel's ecological principles and has used them to guide the development and delivery of the government response, and will use them for future policy pertaining to native vegetation matters.

Major Mitchell's cockatoo (*Lophochroa leadbeateri*) is a hollow-dependent species iconic to agricultural landscapes in south-western Queensland.

The Queensland Government response

The Queensland Government welcomes the Panel's final report and its recommendations for improving sustainable management of native vegetation in Queensland. The government thanks the Panel Chair, former Queensland Chief Scientist, Professor Hugh Possingham, and all members of the Panel for their efforts in undertaking this important independent review and providing the final report.

The Queensland Government accepts or accepts in principle all of the recommendations of the Panel. Specifically, the government accepts in full seven of the Panel recommendations and accepts in principle the recommendations to launch an environmental stewardship program, evaluate exemptions for threatened ecosystems and establish an expert advisory committee. This acknowledges that delivery of these recommendations will require more detailed consideration, planning and evaluation by government if they are to be implemented effectively, and deliver on the Panel's intended outcomes.

The *Vegetation Management Act 1999* remains the overarching framework for the state-wide management of native vegetation in Queensland. The objectives of the legislation are to conserve remnant vegetation and high-value regrowth, prevent land degradation and loss of biodiversity, reduce emissions, and allow for sustainable land use.

The rules provide a stable and ecologically robust regulatory framework that enables landholders to undertake sustainable vegetation management on their properties, through a range of measures including exemptions, accepted development codes, area management plans, pathways for development approval and clear prohibitions, where necessary. This framework is complemented by existing incentive programs including the Private Protected Areas programs, $500 million Queensland Land Restoration Fund and Regional Plans.

The Queensland Government shares the Panel's vision for a new way of working with landholders to deliver improved outcomes for native vegetation management. This includes adopting a more harmonised approach to land management that better engages, informs, incentivises and rewards landholders for retaining, protecting, and restoring native vegetation on their properties.

The government agrees to adopt the Panel's ecological objectives, which focus on protecting the remnant Endangered and Of Concern regional ecosystems and high-value regrowth; restoring ecosystems previously impacted by clearing; and improving management practices for biodiversity conservation and environmental outcomes. This approach, which prioritises avoidance of clearing, will enhance biodiversity conservation outcomes for Queensland's threatened and many hollow-dependent species and further reduce emissions associated with vegetation clearing.

To deliver these outcomes, the government will continue to invest in and improve the implementation of a suite of educational, financial, and motivational measures that will further encourage landholders to retain, restore, and manage native vegetation on their properties.

Table 2: The Queensland Government response

Summary of Panel recommendation	Accept / Accept in principle	Queensland Government Response	Status
R1: Maintain regulatory stability	Accept	The Queensland Government accepts this recommendation to maintain a stable and ecologically robust legislative environment that provides security and confidence to landholders. Since 2005, Queensland industries and communities have adopted substantial practice changes to comply with regulations and increase restoration of native vegetation on their land. These efforts have delivered transformative outcomes for Queensland's emissions trajectory, with emerging carbon and nature repair market incentives set to further enhance these trends by providing competitive financial rewards for protecting, restoring and managing native vegetation. Consequently, the government will not change the regulation of Category X land on a PMAV. The government will continue to monitor and publicly report on vegetation clearing rates each year. It will also consider ways to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of regulatory settings, including the Accepted Development Vegetation Clearing Codes (ADVCCs) that provide for low ecological risk clearing, over time.	Underway and ongoing
R2: Improve extension, information, and demonstration	Accept	In partnership with industry, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries will improve approaches to delivering existing education and training programs for producers and agriculture service providers on low emissions production systems, and will enhance existing capacity building programs for producers on low emissions practices and technologies including GHG calculators and carbon sequestration opportunities. Implementation of relevant pathways within the recently-released *Queensland Low Emissions Agriculture Roadmap 2022–2032* will also be optimised by leveraging, where appropriate, investments that aim to deliver regional decarbonisation. Landholder extension services will continue to be supported by the Department of Environment and Science (DES), through delivery of the $500 million Land Restoration Fund; continuing delivery of the $2.3 million Carbon Advice Rebate Scheme, and by the Department of Resources through enhanced engagement to support the operation of the *Vegetation Management Act 1999*. Approaches to improving landholder engagement and enhancing landholder awareness of carbon farming opportunities will be developed collaboratively across agencies and in consultation with the Australian Government.	Commencing in 2023
R3: Launch an environmental stewardship scheme	Accept in principle	The Queensland Government currently delivers a range of programs offering landholders and First Nations peoples financial and non-financial support for their efforts to conserve and manage native vegetation on their land. This includes the $500 million Land Restoration Fund and the Private Protected Areas Program encompassing nature refuges, special wildlife reserves and the NatureAssist toolkit. In addition, a range of other business planning and productivity grants, loans and rebates are available under the Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority (QRIDA). The Queensland Government will consider the Panel's recommendation to complement these existing programs with a broader range of stewardship payment options and recognition schemes, particularly at the entry-level. This evaluation is underway to analyse the different mechanisms that could be leveraged to further recognise, reward, and incentivise landholders and First Nations people that maintain high value native vegetation on their land.	Review underway and ongoing

Summary of Panel recommendation	Accept / Accept in principle	Queensland Government Response	Status
R4: Enhance carbon market opportunities	Accept	The Queensland Government will continue to work with the Australian Government to remove barriers to Queensland landholders participating in financially rewarding carbon and nature repair markets. This includes engagement around Emissions Reduction Fund carbon market methodologies, particularly those with potential to incentivise further avoidance of clearing in Category X areas, retention of trees on agricultural properties for example silvopasture grazing, and sustainable native forestry and plantation expansion onto degraded lands. The government will also consider potential to tailor future rounds of the $500 million Land Restoration Fund toward projects in areas of high-conservation significance that are at risk of clearing, and further incentivise longer project permanence periods over 25 years.	Underway and ongoing
R5: Clearer reporting and communication of SLATS report	Accept	As part of revisions and enhancements to SLATS science in recent years, the Queensland Government has developed a new web-based approach to SLATS reporting enabling a range of breakdowns of woody extent, clearing and regrowth data, including breakdowns for bioregions. The new format also enables direct access to SLATS reporting data, and links to open data publishing of the spatial data. Commencing with the most recent release of SLATS reporting in 2019–20, a vegetation management analysis of the SLATS clearing data (referred to by the Panel as SLATS SCAN) was published on the Department of Resources website, providing further breakdowns in the context of the vegetation management framework. The Queensland Government will also continue to work towards clearer and more timely releases of SLATS reporting and will continue to refine and improve communication of SLATS findings to ensure they are accessible and understandable for key stakeholders. In addition, the Department of Environment and Science, will continue to advance science around vegetation type, condition, structure, and age; allowing improved identification of regional ecosystems that have higher biodiversity conservation value and carbon storage value, and consideration of this information in the design and delivery of government policies and programs.	Underway and ongoing
R6: Enable better enforcement	Accept	The Department of Resources will pilot an enhanced compliance program to reduce carbon emissions, protect biodiversity and contribute to protecting the Great Barrier Reef. This will be achieved by assisting landholders to better understand native vegetation on their properties, how any necessary clearing activities can comply with the vegetation management framework and how vegetation management can assist landholders in reducing their carbon emissions. The program will also ensure restoration of vegetation occurs where clearing is found to be unauthorised.	Commencing in 2023

Summary of Panel recommendation	Accept / Accept in principle	Queensland Government Response	Status
R7: Better regional planning in fragmented bioregions	Accept	The Department of Environment and Science will work with the Australian Government to develop an approach to improve the strategic identification and protection of biodiversity through regional planning. This approach will focus on urban development, resource, and renewable energy planning applications, with key focus areas yet to be determined. These plans will be developed from a strong evidence base, and will incorporate biodiversity values, First Nations knowledge and community objectives. Plans will provide more certainty to industry by specifying areas that cannot be impacted and by supporting more streamlined assessments and approvals in other areas. The Queensland Government will also consider opportunities to advance this recommendation through aligned initiatives, including finer-scale, state-wide mapping of natural capital assets and a committed review of the regional planning frameworks that will consider key environmental areas (such as threatened ecosystems) under the plan that are not suitable for development.	Underway and ongoing
R8: Review exemptions for clearing in threatened ecosystems	Accept in principle	The Queensland Government will commence data and information gathering to advance understanding of how state instruments for urban development, infrastructure, and other activities, may be impacting on threatened ecosystems across the state, and whether these processes consistently consider how impacts on native vegetation have been avoided, minimised, and offset. This foundational work will be essential to informing any future policy reviews that impact on native vegetation. Future policy work will take into consideration the impacts of national reforms including the introduction of national environmental standards, as well as policy reviews and reforms currently underway to improve the Queensland Environmental Offsets framework and SEQ Koala Planning Regulations. This will not include a review of the exemption for vegetation mapped as Category X on either the regulated vegetation map or a PMAV.	Commencing in 2023
R9: Review forestry in threatened ecosystems	Accept	The Queensland Government will finalise the review of the *Managing a native forest practice Accepted Development Vegetation Clearing Code* (ADVCC), based on best available science and taking into consideration the views of the Native Timber Advisory Panel. The government is also investigating the carbon market opportunities for private native forestry and plantations, and the potential for these to deliver additional income streams for landholders by improving biodiversity conservation and emissions reduction outcomes.	Underway and ongoing
R10: Establish a standing expert advisory committee	Accept in principle	The Queensland Government will reconvene the Panel in two years' time to provide an independent review on the government's progress towards implementing the recommendations, and to provide advice on the need for any further changes, if required.	Commencing in 2023

Next steps

Implementation of the Queensland Government response will be progressed in four phases over the next two years.

1. **Immediate initiatives:**
   - Pilot an enhanced compliance program to assist landholders to understand the native vegetation on their properties and comply with legal obligations under the vegetation management framework.
   - Providing incentives for landowners to protect, retain, and restore native vegetation on their properties, through the launch of the $50 million third funding round under the Land Restoration Fund that prioritises projects offering longer-term protections of native vegetation.
   - Providing landholders with opportunities to seek expert advice on the potential financial benefits of protecting, retaining, and restoring native vegetation on their properties through the offer of a further $700,000 in funding under the Carbon Farming Advice Scheme, on top of the $1.6 million already provided.
   - Continue working collaboratively with the Australian Government to develop and implement three initial bioregional plans for Queensland, that will incorporate biodiversity values, First Nations knowledge and community objectives.

2. **Within three to six months:**
   - Initiate a review into the scope and funding structure of the Land Restoration Fund to encourage increased landholder take-up, ensure that projects provide competitive income options for landholders, and deliver more positive biodiversity and native vegetation outcomes.

3. **Within 12 months:**
   - Finalise the review of the *Managing a native forest practice Accepted Development Vegetation Clearing Code* and the delivery of the *Native Timber Action Plan* to provide certainty around the future of sustainable native forestry in Queensland.
   - Commence data and information gathering to further understand the impacts of urban development and infrastructure on threatened regional ecosystems across the state.
   - Finalise the review of key legislative instruments for protecting native vegetation, including the Environmental Offsets framework, subject to the Commonwealth Government finalising the Nature Positive Plan and establishing its revised framework of national environmental offsets, and *Post-Implementation Review: South East Queensland's Koala Habitat Regulations* which prohibit clearing of critical areas of koala habitat.
   - Commence delivering initiatives under the *Queensland Low Emissions Agriculture Roadmap 2022–2032*, including enhanced extension services and business support tools for landholders to increase awareness of and access to emerging environmental markets and Environmental, Social and Governance credentialling (ESG).

4. **In two years:**
   - Reconvene the Panel to evaluate progress and advise on additional measures, if required.

Staged delivery of the response as outlined will allow policy development to occur in consultation with relevant Queensland Government agencies, particularly around recommendations requiring further evaluation and analysis against the Panel's ecological objectives.

This consultative approach will also inform the framework for prioritising Queensland Government investment in native vegetation matters over the next twelve months and beyond, as well as ongoing evaluation of the policy interventions as they are delivered.