

Submission to the Senate Committee Inquiry into the effectiveness of threatened species and ecological communities' protection in Australia

Dr. Jonathan Rhodes (BA, BSc, PhD)

In my submission to the inquiry into the effectiveness of threatened species and ecological communities' protection in Australia, I would like to highlight the failure of Queensland Government legislation to adequately protect the most threatened ecosystems in that state. In Queensland, the Vegetation Management Act was introduced in 1999 and broad-scale clearing came to an end in 2006. Over this period the remnant vegetation clearing rate did decline substantially (Fig. 1A) from a high of around 0.7% of woody remnant vegetation cover per annum in 1999 to around 0.06% of woody remnant vegetation cover per annum in 2009. However, the rate of clearing of “endangered” and “of concern” regional ecosystems (the very regional ecosystems that the Vegetation Management Act is supposed to protect) are still being cleared at rates 1.5 – 2.25 times higher than “not of concern” regional ecosystems (Fig. 2B).

This illustrates the inadequacy of current legislation to provide protection to threatened ecological communities from the cumulative impacts of clearing in Queensland. A more strategic approach to the protection of threatened ecosystems is required that acknowledges and prevents the cumulative (“death by a thousand cuts”) impacts of clearing activities.

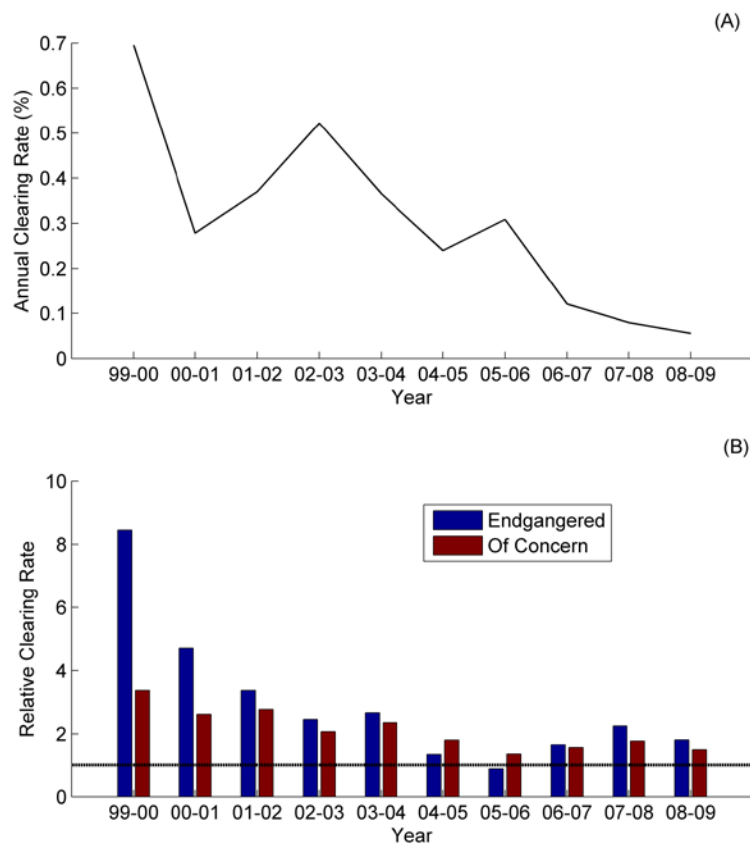


Figure 1. (A) Total annual clearing rate (%) of woody remnant vegetation in Queensland, and (B) clearing rate of “endangered” and “of concern” woody regional ecosystems as a proportion of the clearing rate of “not of concern” woody regional ecosystems. Data Source: Statewide Landcover and Trees Study.