

Drivers of Deforestation and Land Clearing in Queensland

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Abstract

Queensland continues to encounter significant environmental challenges largely attributed to land clearing activities that are mainly driven by social, agricultural and political factors. Whilst clearing rates have slightly declined in recent times, ongoing habitat destruction remains a persistent barrier to achieving the state's commitment to delivering its projected biodiversity and climate agenda. The following key drivers outline prominent contributing factors leading to environmental degradation.

Key Drivers

- **Agricultural Expansion:** as local and global beef demand remains high, cattle grazing continues to be a leading cause of increasing environmental hazards.
- **Population Growth:** continued land clearing and deforestation remains a complex issue as a result of increasing infrastructure development activities.
- **Policy and Legislation:** despite the implementation of stricter regulatory measures, adherence to regulatory standards remain prevalent in various sectors, particularly in regional areas.

Ecological Impact and Stats

- **Biodiversity:** in 2018, over 1.7 million hectares of forest and bushland have experienced high volumes of deforestation and land clearing linked to beef in Queensland, threatening koala habitat and other endangered species.



(Photo by arcadesign)



(Photo by Siraphol)

- **Great Barrier Reef:** between 2021-22, a staggering 113,104 hectares of land clearing in the reef catchment was primarily attributed to beef production causing sediment runoffs - polluting water quality and ecosystems. Alarming, 69,637 hectares of remnant or regenerating forests and bushlands at least 15 years old.

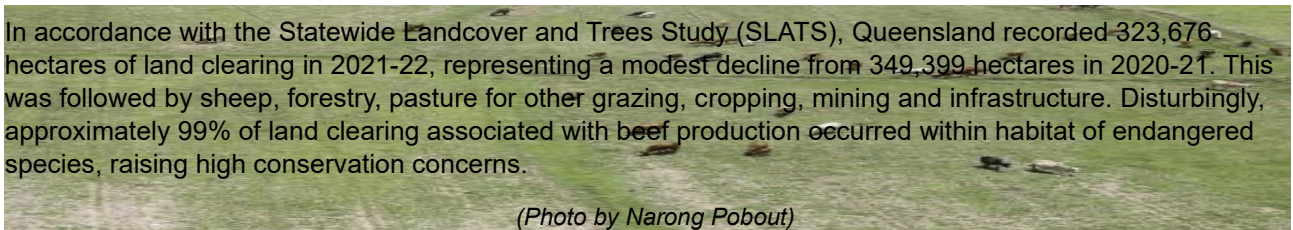
- **Climate Change:** in 2018, deforestation in Australia generated 47 million tons of CO₂ - Queensland taking the lead. Consequently, greater deforestation rates significantly increase the risks of droughts, food scarcity and biodiversity loss.



(Photo by Yevhen Smyk)

Facts

In accordance with the Statewide Landcover and Trees Study (SLATS), Queensland recorded 323,676 hectares of land clearing in 2021-22, representing a modest decline from 349,399 hectares in 2020-21. This was followed by sheep, forestry, pasture for other grazing, cropping, mining and infrastructure. Disturbingly, approximately 99% of land clearing associated with beef production occurred within habitat of endangered species, raising high conservation concerns.



(Photo by Narong Pobout)

Conclusion and recommendations

Based on the discovery findings from the Drivers of deforestation and land clearing in Queensland report, greater regulatory compliance at a state and federal level are fundamental to enforce the monitoring of illegal land clearing and sediment runoffs particularly within the Great Barrier Reef catchment areas. Moving forward, urgent and collaborative action with Traditional Owners is vital to safeguard Queensland's exclusive ecosystem for present, and future generations. Alternatively, failure to act now will not only undermine the state's biodiversity and climate goals, but risk next generation's ability to thrive in liveable environments.

References

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