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# 'DEVASTATING': Land clearing laws blindsided family



by [ANDREW THORPE](#)



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A GLADSTONE family has been left blindsided by the Queensland Government's sudden resurrection of new land clearing laws.

Courtney Johnson, her husband and their two children moved to Wurdong Heights from Biloela about a year ago, looking for a fresh start after they lived through a disaster.

They passed up several other properties, including a large one at Colosseum they had "absolutely loved", before settling on a 96-acre plot 20 minutes from the CBD, partly because it was free of clearing restrictions.

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That changed last week with the return of one of the Labor Party's most controversial proposals.

The changes were introduced to Parliament on Thursday by Natural Resources Minister Anthony Lynham, in keeping with a promise made before last year's state election, but with little warning to landholders.

If passed in their current form, they will reinstate vegetation management controls scrapped by the LNP in 2013, which sparked a surge in tree clearing over the following years, according to a report released last year.

Some of the changes took effect instantly on March 8 - the same day property owners were informed - to "minimise the potential for pre-emptive clearing", according to the Department of Natural Resources website.

"We've all been blindsided," Mrs Johnson told *The Observer*.

“ It was a dream. I came out here, I had this five-to-10-year plan.

"There's a big nice patch of flat land down there where I wanted to put down stables and full sized horse yards and a couple of paddocks.

"We were planning on drifting into cattle... now I probably won't have enough pasture."



📷 SUDDEN CHANGE: The proposed regulated vegetation management map of the Johnsons' property. The brown area is Category C restricted.

Picture: Andrew Thorpe

Among the most significant reforms is a change to the definition of high-value regrowth, making it apply to vegetation not cleared in the last 15 years rather than since December 31, 1989.

This means about half of the Johnsons' property has changed from being largely free of restrictions to being tightly controlled overnight.

"It's devastating," Mrs Johnson said.

"I've had to pass the word on to a few people I've met around the area - this was a dream for us, this was about our future, but for other people this is actually their livelihood.

"This is going to kick them in the guts."

The family is already looking at other properties to move to if the changes go through.

"If we had to sell right now it's going to be an absolute mongrel because we've only just bought it and we're on a mortgage," Mrs Johnson said.

"But we're definitely considering it.

"(The changes) basically take us from 96 acres of usable land down to 40, if that."

Mrs Johnson said she had contacted Gladstone MP Glenn Butcher's office about the laws, but she was uncertain if it would have much effect.

"I've been a Labor supporter since I started voting," she said.

"That may well change."

Mrs Johnson said she was not against the idea of conservation, but just did not want it to override the rights of landholders.

"I just think people buying a property should be able to know (the rules beforehand)," she said.

She said she was urging people to sign [a petition](#) that is being circulated against the laws.





LAND SHOCK: Courtney Johnson was left reeling after land clearing laws were reintroduced to Queensland Parliament.

Picture: Matt Taylor GLA110318LAND

### The Queensland Government says the proposed new laws will:

ban broadscale clearing of remnant vegetation for agriculture

expand the "high value regrowth" that is protected from vegetation that hasn't been cleared since the beginning of 1990 (28 year-old trees) to 15-year-old trees

increase, up to almost treble, the maximum penalties courts could impose for illegal clearing to more than half-a-million-dollars

give compliance officers more powers and enforcement tools

require farmers to get approval to thin vegetation

- 
- still allow farmers to harvest fodder trees to feed livestock

Dr Anthony Lynham said the laws will protect the climate, wildlife and the Great Barrier Reef, plus the tens of thousands of jobs that depend on it.

"Landholders will still be able to maintain their land and clear fodder trees to feed their stock, and the majority of landholders will continue to do the right thing, as they do now," he said.

"The improved maps now reflect the best available sciences and will support landholders to manage their land."

The bill will now go through the committee process.



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