

Land Clearing

We call it “deforestation” when it happens overseas, but “land clearing” here. In Australia, the biggest driver is and has always been meat production. The brutal substitution of pasture and livestock for wildlife and habitat. (Image: Bill Laurance)

Background

We have deforested over 100 million hectares¹ of Australia since white arrival. The major causes of this deforestation are clear from the statistics on land use². We crop around 30 million hectares while our towns and cities occupy only 3 million.

The major cause of deforestation historically and currently is animal agriculture; cattle and sheep. There are over 70 million hectares of *improved pasture*. This is land that has been cleared and is fertilised and planted with feed and fodder crops. In addition these animals graze 344 million hectares of native vegetation. All up, animal agriculture occupies over half of the 770 million hectares of mainland Australia.

Despite the fact that Australia’s cattle population has been falling since 2013, land clearing for cattle not only continues but is currently increasing because of the removal of deforestation restrictions in Queensland. This allowed almost 400,000 hectares to be cleared in 2015-16³.

Australia used to have a sheep population of about 170 million in 1990 and a cattle population of some 26 million. The sheep population is now about 75 million, which should allow massive reforestation. But the imperative to clear land remains because some sections of the sheep and cattle industry *mine* land rather than farm it. After land has been cleared, it is very productive for a few years. After this brief period, it is cheaper to clear new land and move on than it is to restore productivity to the now clapped out country.

But it isn’t just Australian forests that are impacted by our cattle. When they are exported to Indonesia, they are typically placed in feedlots for some months. One standard feed is the *palm kernel meal* left over from the palm kernel oil extraction process. This is otherwise a waste product, so there is a synergy between rainforest destruction for palm oil and the feedlotting of cattle using a byproduct of that process.

¹<https://soe.environment.gov.au/>

²http://www.agriculture.gov.au/abares/aclump/Documents/Land_use_in_Australia_at_a_glance_2006.pdf

³<https://www.qld.gov.au/environment/land/vegetation/mapping/slats-reports>

Policy

The Animal Justice Party (AJP) considers Australia’s land clearing rates to be both an environmental and animal welfare disaster. We propose to reverse land clearing by addressing the underlying causes.

Animal agriculture is overwhelmingly the largest cause of land clearing across Australia. For example, in Queensland, 93% of cleared land is used for pasture. Other significant drivers (within the remaining 7 percent) are urban development, forestry and mining.

Environmentally, land clearing destroys viable habitat for vulnerable and at-risk animal populations. Clearing also increases soil salinity and is a primary cause of greenhouse gas emissions. Soil erosion from land clearing detrimentally affects waterways and oceans; threatening the Great Barrier Reef especially.

The AJP recognises land clearing not just as a biodiversity and climate change issue, but also as an animal rights and welfare issue. Every year millions of animals die from the destruction of habitat. Animals are injured and die during tree felling with many more dying afterwards from exposure; dehydration; starvation; increased predation; and traffic. Even if they don’t die, animals who are displaced will end up pushed into an unsuitable or reduced area.

Key Objectives

1. An immediate cessation of all land clearing associated with animal agriculture.
2. To introduce habitat protection as a fundamental and consistent planning principle in all regions and sectors.
3. Amend state-based animal welfare legislation to include an enforceable duty of care towards animals on a landholder’s property during all land use changes.
4. Labelling on products containing palm oil so that consumers can avoid them.



Want a political voice for animals? Join, donate, or find out more about the Animal Justice Party at animaljusticeparty.org. You can also read our policies designed to provide animals with a voice here: animaljusticeparty.org/policieslist.

Authorised by: Geoff Russell, 6 Fifth Ave, St Morris SA 5068