

Lawyers hit out at land Bill

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FAR Northern conservationists have stood their ground on controversial land-clearing laws, despite the state's peak body for solicitors labelling them "unjust" and "backward".

The Queensland Law Society yesterday presented evidence to a public hearing in Brisbane as a government committee concluded its inquiry into the Palaszczuk Government's vegetation management reforms.

Society president Bill Potts said the Bill to restrict land clearing around the state was comparable to the anti-bikie laws.

"QLS has a longstanding commitment to evidence-based policy, and there is simply no evidence to support the radical changes to prosecution," Mr Potts said.

Australian Conservation Foundation's Andrew Picone

disagreed, arguing the proposed changes were in place before the Newman government "gutted" them.

"QLS' claims are outrageous and a misrepresentation of the facts," Mr Picone said.

Environmental Defenders Office of Northern Queensland principal solicitor Tania Heber disputed QLS' claims that the Bill removed landholders' legal rights.

"The so-called reversal of the onus of proof provisions do not remove the presumption of innocence," she said.

"The department prosecutors would still need to prove each element of the vegetation-clearing offence before an offence could be proved."

But Dalrymple MP Shane Knuth was sceptical.

"We have law-abiding citizens who could be criminals overnight because of a flawed mapping system," he said. "We would like to see the vegetation management laws thrown out."