I am pleased that the Government is currently reviewing vegetation clearance regulations after they were weakened by the previous government.

Victoria is the most cleared state in Australia, and it is recognised that native vegetation provides many benefits in many ways. In particular, original vegetation supports a higher density of species than regenerated areas.

Presently there are too many "existing use" clauses and exceptions. These exceptions are the biggest cause of loss of remnant vegetation, and lead to situations where individual considerations cannot be assessed. For example, old trees in otherwise cleared areas cannot be assessed. Exceptions need to be formalised and clarified under set rules and principles, so we do not have the situation that exists now where the Department Secretary personally has the power to approve clearing of land on Crown Land.

There needs to be more detailed maps to cover local areas instead of relying on overviews and modelling. This would identify key areas of habitat for dispersed species. More information needs to be collected dealing with entire vegetation communities, not just threatened species communities. This was previously done through the Ecological Classes and Bioregion programs. When consideration is only given to statewide communities, vegetation communities in particular regions are ignored.

The issue of offsets is a contentious area. The emphasis needs to be on avoidance rather than minimise or offset when considering applications. Offsets often do not take into consideration the effect on wider communities.

In regard to the regulation of clearing of native vegetation, there needs to be adequate funding to ensure regulations are adhered to. Streamlining of exceptions means permits for clearing are insufficiently scrutinised. The lower impact thresholds for referral to DELWP and the associated offsetting strategy would be welcome, as would action requiring all third party offsets to be registered on the DELWP Credit Register.

As there are often conflicts of interest when deciding on particular vegetation clearing requests, the establishment of an independent regulator, and establishment of measurable objectives, would assist in balanced determinations, and enable tabling of annual reports on the success of the objectives.