



Speech by

HOWARD HOBBS

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

Hansard 26 August 1999

ACQUISITION OF LAND AMENDMENT BILL

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (4.18 p.m.): It is my pleasure to speak on the Acquisition of Land Amendment Bill. As the shadow Minister has said, the Opposition will be supporting the legislation before the House today.

There are a number of issues involved in the acquisition of land. There always seems to be disruption and uncertainty. It is unfortunate, but that is the way it is. People can bet their boots that if land has to be acquired for a dam, for instance, it is always at the bottom of the valley, with the best soil, with the highest value and occupied by people who have been there for a long time. Of course, there is a lot of heartache involved.

At the end of the day, acquisition falls into two categories—voluntary and compulsory acquisition. Usually voluntary acquisition does not work out too bad and people can get on with their lives. With compulsory acquisition, where no conclusion can be reached, things are made very difficult and there is a lot of heartache for everybody concerned.

Generally speaking, and from what I understand, I am pleased to say that in the majority of cases the recompense paid is satisfactory. But there are some isolated cases that do occasionally arise that tend to leave a sour note on the whole land acquisition program of a Government. When there is a genuine need to acquire land for community purposes, we have a philosophy that if the Government of the day requires land for community purposes, the community must pay, and they must pay the going rate. They must also pay to relocate people into virtually similar situations to what they have at present—if that is the desire of the people whose land is being acquired.

Today I want to share with members of the House just how this uncertainty has eroded security of tenure in Queensland. I notice that this Bill will help to modify that in a certain way. I refer to 10 or 15 years ago, when security of tenure was not a great concern. If one goes through the history books and the minutes of many industry organisations that met throughout the State, one finds that the issue of security of tenure was not raised. It came about during the Paul Keating era, when native title popped up, when Wayne Goss came along, when there was a freeze on freeholding, and when the tree-clearing guidelines were first flagged by the Goss Government. In fact, I think that the Goss Government could probably claim to have cleared more trees—through its actions and the way it handled the issue during that particular period—than has any Government in Queensland's history. It indulged in panic clearing. If it had handled the issue in a better way, and if it had understood it better, I am sure that it would have been able to work its way through those problems.

The national park acquisition program was under way at that time. Some people voluntarily left their land and were paid good money. In other cases, people were basically sent to the wall because of collaboration between the department and the banks against some land-holders. I remember some dreadful cases. We had to try to help people when there was no hope at all. If they had been given one or two more years, they might have survived; but they were forced to sell during droughts and that type of thing. It was just awful.

Something else happened during the Goss Government era—something that members opposite need to understand. I am not making this up; this is history. During the six years of the Goss Government, it chalked up \$100,000 a week in potential compensation claims in the Land Court by companies against the Government. That is a record that I hope will never, ever be broken in this

country again. When I took over as Minister, there was \$300m worth of outstanding claims in appeals against decisions of the Goss Government. That indicated once again to people that the security of tenure that they thought they had did not exist.

If the Government genuinely wants to acquire land for roads, housing, railways or whatever the case may be, it has this history behind it. In fact, all Governments have this history behind them. We are all damned by the people out there, no matter what Government is in power, because of the uncertainty that many people have faced in the past.

I wish to cite one example. I hope that the Minister may be able to shed some light on this, even though it does not relate particularly to this Bill. There are some people in north Queensland who have a similar family name to mine but are no relation. Mahogany gliders were found on their property. The owners were notified, and they were told that their land was going to be acquired for a national park or for wildlife purposes. But that saga is still continuing. The value of their land basically has not improved; in fact it has decreased. That is because of the new tree-clearing guidelines. The land now has a lower value than it had when it was possible for it to be cleared.

These are purely departmental issues that should be able to be resolved. The Government should be able to say to its departmental people, "Acquire that land. This is the date when we decided to acquire that land, and that is the date it works from." It should not do that three, four or five years down the track, when those people are being disadvantaged. This Government is placing a burden around the neck of future Governments. All members hear these stories. They can bet their boots that any bad luck story is the one that is going to hit the headlines. This Government is making it harder for future Governments to be able to manage and genuinely acquire land that is required for community purposes. It must pay the going rate for the land at the time the decision is made to acquire it. Governments must also ensure that people who are dispossessed in some manner receive adequate compensation to allow them to purchase a similar block of land. If people want to continue with the type of lifestyle from which they are being plucked, then it is the Government's role to ensure that it is able to satisfy those people through monetary compensation.

The Bill before the House makes a number of minor amendments. As the shadow Minister pointed out quite adequately, the Opposition will support the Bill. I just hope that some members of the House have taken note of the genuine sentiments that I have expressed today. I have had a lot to do with these issues. Obviously I could talk for hours about this, but it has been my genuine intention to explain some of the more significant points in relation to land acquisition. With those few comments, I support the Bill.
