



Speech by

**HOWARD HOBBS**

**MEMBER FOR WARREGO**

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### **VEGETATION MANAGEMENT BILL**

**Mr HOBBS** (Warrego—NPA) (2.48 p.m.): I am pleased to speak today on the Vegetation Management Bill 1999. This legislation will acquire the rights of private land-holders without compensation. It is, in other words, the nationalisation of freehold land in Queensland—not all of it, but that is the basic principle of it. It is the thin end of the wedge. As has been said before, this legislation is before the House with no State planning code in existence. It is advertised in the paper and on the TV, but it is nowhere to be seen. We the legislators have not seen it. There has been no consultation on the State planning code. There has been no input by the stakeholders into its development.

What is it? What does it mean? The code benchmarks the assessment of vegetation management—what people can and cannot do. The code prescribes a range of standards—that is, the riparian buffers, the clearing application, and the preservation of remnant, endangered and of-concern ecosystems. What does this mean to individual land-holders? We do not know because the Government has not provided the information to us.

Mr Beattie said that compensation was a key issue in delivering a balanced outcome. He is offering us \$100m plus another \$20m. The formula has really never been explained. Apart from this morning at question time when the Minister made some observations about a few figures, nobody has had a chance to say, "What does this mean to me as a land-holder? If I lose this right, what is the balancing offset that I am going to get?" It is like buying a used car sight unseen.

I will give an example of compensation in relation to a freeholding lease. If somebody pays \$5,000 a year for a lease and they decide to change to a freehold lease, they may then pay \$10,000 a year. Say it is a 30-year lease. They could be five years through it as of today. They have 25 years to go. That is \$125,000 they will be paying off over the next 25 years, plus interest. What is the benefit? They have lost the fundamental right to the reason why they went to a freehold lease in the first place. It has gone. They need compensation for a start. There is no mention so far of how small plantations of native timber will be dealt with under this legislation. What codes will they have to comply with? Will it make those smaller plantations unviable? We know about the RFA process, but what about those smaller enterprises with smaller plantations? If they have to leave a certain amount of timber, that might make them totally unviable.

The Integrated Planning Act gives development approvals in perpetuity. The legislation does not support the spirit of the IPA when it comes to the term of tree-clearing permits. As I said, the IPA gives development approvals in perpetuity, but it would appear that tree-clearing permits will be for two years and not issued in perpetuity at all. The present 30-day time frame has now been extended to December 2000. It is a de facto moratorium. That is not going to be satisfactory at all.

I have made numerous speeches in this House pointing out that the method of vegetation management proposed before the House is not necessary to meet conservation, greenhouse and State and Federal Government requirements. The perception that the 340,000 hectares of land that is cleared annually remains cleared forever is wrong. Evidence shows that at least 40% returns to vegetation and 60% of that land was regrowth in the first place. Therefore, the cleared amount comes back to a maximum of 61,400 hectares of cleared land or 0.008% of the 72 million hectares of woodland in Queensland. Research has identified that Queensland's grazing industry is also a net sink for greenhouse gas and not a net source, as has been promoted by many. Land use in Queensland

will meet the Kyoto emission rates as agreed. Australian clearing generates 78 million tonnes of emissions. It can go to 90 million tonnes and still meet the standards. On top of that, we still have a credit of 140 million tonnes through the thickening process of vegetation, which I have spoken about in this House before. There is more standing woodland in Queensland today than at the time of white settlement.

In relation to carbon credits, an issue that is particularly important, the Kyoto Protocol determined that we were to use 1990 levels as baseline emission data. We can increase that by 8%. Therefore, we create a pool of annually issued carbon emission permits. The land use change sector has its own subpool of emission credits from land clearing. For example, in 1990 Queensland cleared 480,000 hectares of timber. If we add 8% to that, it increases to 500,000, and that is still within the Kyoto limits. If clearing is reduced to 200,000 hectares—and it could be reduced to that if people were not doing the panic clearing that the Government has forced them to do—that would give a 300,000 hectare a year credit, which is equivalent to \$225m per year in carbon credits which the land use industry can claim. That is nearly a billion dollars every four years. Yet, the Government wants to give a one-off payment of \$120m and say, "Go to buggery, go to hell."

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Mickel): Order! I know it is an emotional topic, but that is unparliamentary and the member will withdraw.

**Mr HOBBS:** I withdraw. The issue is this: people were unaware of the Internet and then it snuck up on everybody. People are unaware of exactly what carbon emissions are all about. It is big money. If land use industries do not capture the credit dollars for lowering emissions, then power, transport and others will get them for free. The Government is robbing the bush. That is what the Government is doing. Rural industry, in particular freehold land-owners, will need to mount a court challenge. I give notice that we will be pursuing this matter very vigorously. This is the most significant intersectoral change with a monetary potential in living memory.

The Greens and other sectors are handing over fossil fuel emissions and blaming them for global warming. Trees can be economically regrown, but burnt coal cannot be put back into the ground. That is the simple fact of the matter. If people want to look at the real message behind this, it is that there is a lot of money involved. We are talking hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars that will be able to be used, traded and sold. Wouldn't it be far better if the land use sector had that \$200m-odd coming to it year after year after year after year? It can go on. It would be something that we can only dream about, and the Government is taking away that right in a lot of ways.

It is also wrong to stereotype all farmers as environmental vandals. Governments should provide evidence of unsuitable practices. We hear from the other side of the House about unsustainable practices all the time. Can somebody please explain where these unsustainable practices have been supposedly going on in the last couple of years? Where is this clearing going on? Whereabouts is it? Can somebody say? Can somebody tell us? There does not seem to be a lot of response from the other side.

**A Government member:** Yes, we can.

**Mr HOBBS:** We would love to hear where they are. The other side of the House also keeps talking about the agreement with Senator Hill for Bushcare funding. There is confusion about all the different funds. Senator Hill and the previous Queensland Government signed an agreement in relation to Bushcare funding. That is one issue. Another issue is that this Government is trying to coax \$100m out of the Federal Government to reduce tree-clearing. There are two different issues here. We had nothing to do with the second issue, but we know something about the first issue.

Members opposite keep saying that the previous Government signed an agreement to lock up this country. We signed an agreement to put together a protocol, a set of guidelines, a process and a voluntary code that would work. We put that document together and we signed it. There is no reason why that would not work. There is no sense in saying, "We had to do it the way we are doing it." The Government is wrong. They are misleading the House. They are telling untruths.

Salinity is an issue that has been talked about as well. It is a very important aspect. We know it happened down south and we do not want that to ever happen in Queensland. The salinity report was a very preliminary report which itself said that the data has not been fully assessed and that the data should be taken as very preliminary. There is also another issue in relation to salinity. The Minister ran around talking about the outbreak of salinity at Nindigully of 700,000 hectares. The reality is that that sudden outbreak he talked about was an ancient lake that has been there since time began. The local land-holders have been working on it for seven years. It is 2,000 hectares and has never had trees on it. It was always basically open savanna land—

**Mr Welford:** This was your story. I never mentioned Nindigully.

**Mr HOBBS:** The Minister did so. All the Minister has to do is read the press reports and reports from the ABC which quoted the Minister. The reality is that the Government is misleading the public in trying to portray that salinity is going to be a very serious issue. The Government was wrong. It is a

serious issue, but in this particular instance that was not the case. They are working on that salinity area. Test holes have been drilled. Those land-holders are doing exactly the right thing. They applied for NHT funding three times, but it was knocked back twice because the problem was insignificant. They eventually got the money and they have drilled these holes to make sure that they are doing the right thing. That is good.

The Premier said that existing permits on leasehold land would be honoured. Well, big deal! Those permits have been issued in good faith and now the Premier is saying, "We're going to issue something that should be yours anyway."

In one case in my electorate, a grazier has been working with the DNR to get a permit for leasehold land. Last Friday, that permit was agreed to and everything was all right. Two days ago, he was told that the director-general has ordered that no more permits be issued and, unfortunately, that fellow's permit—though approved—has now been stopped. I hope that the Minister and the Government honour that type of situation where someone already has approval but it perhaps has not been entered into the computer system in Brisbane, or perhaps the mail was slow; I do not know. But that is a terribly unfair situation. In other cases, people have had their applications in for a long time. That fellow's application took nearly 90 days to be approved. So there will be other people who have experienced further delays, which makes this situation even worse.

Presently, permits are issued on leasehold land but not freehold land. So someone who has a leasehold permit can continue with development. But under this Bill, on freehold land everything stops. People have to go through a particular process just to lodge an application. But at this stage, there is no-one to process those applications. So people with freehold land are at a disadvantage. Many councils or DNR offices in some regions have no experienced staff, so they will not be able to process those applications. What about plant operators? They will be out of work. There are many people and activities involved in this: buffel seed harvesters; yard builders; new stock watering facilities for land development; purchase of livestock; stock and station agents; fencing materials; stockmen; plant; graders; four-wheel drives; trucks; and tractors. Hundreds of people will be impacted upon and, in many instances, put out of work.

If this legislation related to mining, for instance, the Labor Party would be saying, "We have to go on strike. We cannot have this. Those people are out of work." This situation is exactly the same in many ways. In particular, people who work in the mines also operate machines on properties, build dams and undertake development. But we have heard nothing about them—not a word. In fact, all we have is a regional development impact assessment that was done by the DPI and which has been hidden. I do not believe that this Government is fair dinkum. I do not think that anyone believes this Government at all. Many people will be financially impacted upon. Where is the hospital wagon? What is the Government doing in relation to helping those people? It is just putting people on the scrap heap.

The existing regional leasehold guidelines were locally driven and scientifically based. They were the best in Australia—world-class. People were coming over here to see how we were doing it, and they wanted to do the same sort of thing in their countries. But those guidelines have been thrown out. The new guidelines are going over the top of existing leasehold guidelines, which were put together with the best will in the world and with cooperation. But no, this Government knows best. It has thrown them out. People have been disregarded. These new guidelines will be more prescriptive and more restrictive.

**Mr Welford:** Still the best in Australia.

**Mr HOBBS:** The Minister says "the best in Australia". That will be a matter for determination. He will find that, because of what he has put in place, people will not accept his argument.

The clearing of regrowth, which the member for Fitzroy, Mr Pearce, mentioned, is a good example. Yes, in some areas people can clear regrowth. But regrowth is about the fundamental principle of good management, and we do not want further barriers put in place. In a statement to the conservationists, the Premier said that regrowth is all right. He said that it contributes to conservation and that endangered regional ecosystems may be declared areas of high nature conservation value and protected from clearing. He said also that regrowth may be declared as an area of high conservation value or vulnerable to degradation for other reasons. The reality is that this Government can declare any part of Queensland as coming within that provision. In fact, in regions of concern, where the Government wants to try to increase the number of species, it would be able to impose limitations on the clearing of those areas. So it is not true to say that all regrowth can be cleared. That is just not correct.

People are concerned that the Minister's attitude will make the clearing of regrowth harder. The assurances that have been given so far are not worth the paper they are written on. Division 4 of the Bill gives the Minister absolutely unlimited power. All one has to do is ask the people in the bush whether they trust the Minister. They certainly do not. Next, he will be wanting to dictate how they manage grass. I can see that coming, and so can many other people. Labor has embarked on a campaign of misinformation, deliberate mistruths and standover tactics. Industry groups have said that the Minister

has deliberately misrepresented the figures in relation to tree clearing. He deliberately distorted the figures and created a false impression in relation to salinity. I do not know how he can do that.

As other members have said, the Premier was flying at 30,000 feet, eyeballing particular types of tenure and supposedly knowing exactly where the boundaries were. He said that he supports the farmers but that the farmers cannot manage their land in a sustainable manner. Where is that land that is not being treated in a sustainable manner? The Premier told industry groups, "I am an old-style democrat. Everyone will have an opportunity to speak on this legislation before the House." The man cannot be trusted. It is as simple as that.

The member for Fitzroy spoke about maintenance and cutting posts. He is incorrect in his assumption. If people want to do maintenance, yes, they can cut posts from trees. But if they want to build a new fence line, the reality is that they have to have a permit, but they cannot get permits on freehold land any more. And if they do not have permits and they get caught, under this legislation their plant can be seized. It is just not worth it.

And finally, guess what: we have more amendments! We have a Bill that has been before the House for one day, and we have three pages of amendments already.

**Mr Lester:** Didn't we have trouble like this with the water Bill?

**Mr HOBBS:** The situation with the water Bill was the same. Every time this Government introduces legislation, it has to make amendments to it. That is totally incompetent. For heaven's sake! How much do we have to go through? We have been struggling to try to work our way through the Bill. We do not have all the data that is required to determine exactly what the State code is.

**Mr Beanland:** A secret Government.

**Mr HOBBS:** As the Leader of Opposition Business says, it is a secret Government. These amendments could mean anything. We have to work them out.

Time expired.

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