



Speech by

**HOWARD HOBBS**

**MEMBER FOR WARREGO**

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Hansard 30 November 1999

### **TREE-CLEARING GUIDELINES**

**Mr HOBBS** (Warrego—NPA) (6.25 p.m.): I refer to my speech during the Matters of Public Interest debate this morning. The Minister stated that the latest figures showed that 340,000 hectares of land were cleared from 1995 to 1997, and that there was 18% regrowth in that overall area. The interesting thing is that 289,000 hectares were cleared between 1991 and 1995, with regrowth of between 60% and 70%. Why has the position changed under the Minister's figures? I think that the Minister has manipulated the figures, just as he did with the RFA process. What happened to the other 47% of regrowth? Why has the figure suddenly changed?

I really believe that the Minister has manipulated the figures and has not told the truth in relation to tree clearing, and it is a very serious matter. There is 159,000 hectares of timber that should be accounted for which has not been accounted for. Forty per cent of all timber cleared reverts to regrowth. If members opposite want to go through the figures, I point out that of 340,000 hectares, 40% reverts to regrowth. The figures are all there. That leaves 204,000 hectares. If 65% of that is regrowth, or 132,000 hectares, therefore that is 61,400 that is left cleared. That is 0.0008% of the 72 million hectares of forest—woodland—in Queensland.

Presently, research has identified the Queensland grazing industries as a net sink for greenhouse gas and carbon dioxide; it is not a net source. Research also indicates that thickening of Queensland vegetation absorbs approximately 140 million megatons of carbon dioxide each year, more than double the volume being emitted by the land use and forestry sectors. Therefore, the previous national greenhouse gas inventory that seems to have been quoted today which attributes 24% of national emissions of carbon dioxide to land use and forestry industries is incorrect. I state again: it is incorrect. The Minister was quoting figures to the effect that Queensland clears something like 80% of vegetation in Australia and attributing 18% to land clearing and greenhouse gas emissions. That is not the case. Those figures are incorrect and he needs to go back and look at them.

The thickening process is there. It is documented. Dr Bill Burrows has done a lot of work on that. Members must understand that in some cases the more trees you have, the more degradation you are going to get. That is not always the case, but it is in a lot of cases. More trees means less grass and more run-off. The trees do not allow the grass to grow. Then the winds come through, creating erosion and the topsoil goes. It is as simple as that. Grass will bind soil. We need trees and grass in the river system, of course, but in a lot of those smaller creeks and gullies grass will actually bind them far better than trees ever will.

By his amendment, the Minister implies that the Federal Minister for the Environment, Senator Robert Hill, claims that we need to carry on with what we started. There was nothing at all that we did which indicated that we had to establish guidelines in relation to freehold land. The fact is that we were to work our way through that process. It is a mistruth that has been put out by the Minister to the various industry groups that Robert Hill is actually demanding that this occur and that it occurred under us. It did not occur under us. I will give that guarantee to anyone. Those opposite are using Senator Hill to push their case.

Labor's agenda and the conservationists' agenda is to stop vegetation management. They are using all the arguments relating to tree clearing, salinity and endangered species. The reality is that the

first increase we have had was only a spike in the graph, and where it has gone up it will come down. The increase is simply a direct result of the action of this Government's attitude to tree clearing.

The other argument used in this issue is salinity, which was mentioned by the member for Barron River. At the end of the day, the Minister said—shock, horror—"What about Nindigully and the 7,000 hectares of salt just found?" Guess what? It was 2,000 hectares. It was an old lake. There have never been trees on it. It has been there since time began. Landcare people have been working on it for the last seven years. It is not a shock, horror report. The audit report says—

"This information is yet to be independently received and should be considered preliminary in nature. It is not expected that dry land salinity in Queensland will dominate the landscape within the next 100 years as observed in southern and western Australia."

Time expired.

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