



Speech by

Mr JIM PEARCE

MEMBER FOR FITZROY

Hansard 30 November 1999

TREE-CLEARING GUIDELINES

Mr PEARCE (Fitzroy—ALP) (6.30 p.m.): Since this debate started tonight, we have heard the Opposition trying desperately to sound like it supports our rural land-holders. Well, the proof is in the voting. Very shortly those opposite will get a chance to show just how much they care about rural and regional Queensland. There is no doubt that this issue of vegetation management is on the minds of our farmers and graziers. The vast majority are already smart operators who know how to get the best out of their land. They have nothing to worry about from any new guidelines introduced by this Government.

Ever since this Government came to office, it has been open and honest about its intentions. Rather than imposing solutions on land-holders, it began a process that involved land-holders. An example of the outcomes achieved through the consultation process is the agreement that legitimate harvesting of private timber grown for commercial harvesting reasons will be guaranteed. It will be exempted from any regulations on vegetation management. That agreement has been reached through consultation and understanding.

Apart from the Vegetation Management Advisory Committee, which invited all stakeholders around the table, there have been meetings all around Queensland—in the sheds, on properties, in halls—all with the purpose of involving land-holders in the process. Stakeholders are involved; they are working through the issues. By spending time in my electorate and speaking with the Minister, I know that the concerns of land-holders operating beef and grain growing properties within the Brigalow Belt are being heard. These primary producers make a valuable contribution to the State's economy. Far from affecting their productivity and profitability, we intend to help them do even better.

We are all concerned about the few cowboys. We know there are a lot out there. There are cowboys out there and there are cowboys in here. We all have concerns about those few cowboys who clear the land for the sake of clearing land without taking into consideration the topography and the likely impacts.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr PEARCE: These are my own words, actually.

Indiscriminate clearing of timber leaves land vulnerable to soil erosion and invasion of salt, which can ruin fertile agricultural areas. Just a few minutes ago the member for Warrego was arguing against that.

The main issue of concern for me in central Queensland has been that of regrowth areas and what will happen under the new guidelines. I have had discussions with the Minister. I can say to the people in my area of central Queensland that growth areas will always be an important factor in the ongoing viability of primary production. To put a stop to the clearing of regrowth areas would be akin to taking money out of the hip pocket of primary producers. Those opposite know that and I know that.

The Minister has assured me that land-holders who have demonstrated a commonsense approach to land management through a balanced land clearing strategy have nothing to fear. That is what we are saying to them, and those opposite are scaremongering and trying to change the whole picture. The Minister is listening. He has gained a lot of respect for the way in which he goes out into rural Queensland, sits down and listens patiently to what land-holders have to say. He is respected for

that. Because he is doing that, we are going to come up with the decisions and the outcomes that will suit those people on the land.

This Government understands the land management approach of land-holders in the Fitzroy electorate and other parts of Queensland and recognises the important contribution these people make to regional Queensland and the Queensland economy. But what we need now to advance this constructive process is support from the Commonwealth. It is not Queenslanders holding up the process. The Premier has already indicated that the State will make a meaningful financial contribution. This Government is providing a fair financial contribution in the interests of rural Queenslanders. The coalition should be supporting the Government by pressuring the Federal Government into making a fair contribution to this agreement.

We have demonstrated a willingness. It is about time those opposite got out there and did the same thing. What those opposite are doing are letting the Liberals in Canberra run the show. The Liberals are putting it over National Party members in Queensland, and they are putting it over National Party members in the Federal Parliament. The Liberals are running the show. The National Party members are nothing in the Federal Parliament; they have not got the courage to stand up to their coalition colleagues.
