



Speech by

**Mr JIM PEARCE**

**MEMBER FOR FITZROY**

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### **TREE-CLEARING GUIDELINES**

**Mr PEARCE** (Fitzroy—ALP) (6.52 p.m.): As elected representatives of the people of Queensland, we have obligations to be environmentally conscious of the day-to-day activities of our lifestyles that impact on our land, our waterways, our oceans and the air that we breathe. The tree-clearing issue is one that will always cause division in the community. It takes courage to do something about an issue that has been ignored by successive Governments. This Government has the courage to get on with the job and come up with the best outcome for all parties. In the interests of future Queenslanders, tree clearing is an issue that requires a commonsense approach by all parties—landowners, environmentalists, the public and political parties from both sides of the House.

I do not think anyone on this side of the House doubts that there has been an uncertainty surrounding the guidelines that has seen some farmers continue to clear land in anticipation of increased restriction. The proposed reforms will involve new controls over freehold land. Perhaps there will be tighter restrictions, but I do not accept that the answer to the yet unannounced proposed changes is indiscriminate clearing—panic clearing that can potentially have a significant impact on the long-term viability of a property.

I cannot recall ever hearing the Premier or any Minister of the Government saying that tree clearing would be forever banned. My understanding is that, yes, as a Government representing the people of this State we will expect tree clearing to be carried out in a way that gets right the balance between clearing indiscriminately, disregarding the long-term sustainability of the land, or commonsense clearing using approved guidelines to allow for the expansion of industry that is sustainable and, at the same time, ensures that local ecosystems survive and that nature's own environmental checks and balances are respected. There are lessons to be learnt from the past that should be heeded immediately by landowners who are out there clearing large areas simply to beat the proposed changes.

The hypocrisy of the people sitting on the other side of the House never ceases to amaze me. When in Government, the National Party recognised that the number of trees lost through clearing greatly outstripped those planted, and hence Queensland was under strong pressure to act. In 1997 the then National Party Government signed a Federal agreement under the Natural Heritage Trust program requiring that by June 2001 as many trees had to be planted as were cut down. The agreement specifically required new controls on clearing, but the Nationals, now in Opposition, strongly opposed that as an affront to the sacrosanctity of private property. What hypocrisy!

We should be taking a few things into consideration in this debate. I quote from an article in the Sydney Morning Herald written by Greg Roberts, who talked about an economist, Dr John Rolfe. The article states—

"In a recent study, Rolfe concludes that while productivity is boosted within a few years of clearing, it gradually declines."

Those opposite should know that. The article goes on to state—

"In the two years to 1995, when hundreds of thousands of hectares were cleared, beef production statewide dropped from 750,000 tonnes a year to 650,000 tonnes."

Yes, I know that we have to take into consideration the drought, but there was only a slight increase. The article goes on to state—

"Rolfe says: 'If you look at other shires where there has been much less clearing, there is not much difference.'"

That is, in the productivity levels. Guess what? The article goes on to state—

"Rolfe doubles as a farmer, running an 18,000-hectare cattle property, Broken Dray, near Springsure, south of Clermont.

He intends to leave the 40 per cent of the property still in its natural state."

What are those opposites saying? That he is a fool because he has a head on his shoulders, he has a little bit of commonsense and he is doing the right thing? He is keeping the balance right. The article goes on to state—

"Adam Clark, who runs cattle on two properties near Taroom, south-west of Springsure, says it is in farmers' long-term interests to retain vegetation because it helps protect pasture from the elements, and is an insurance against salinity."

Is that man a fool, too? That is what those opposites are trying to say those people are. The article goes on to state—

"Salinity is again in the headlines, with the Murray-Darling Basin Authority's salinity audit, released last week, painting a grim picture of the problems posed by rising salt levels in soil and water nationwide.

Queensland has been largely spared these woes, in part because it does not have the southern States' long history of land clearing.

This is changing, the audit says, with between 10,000 and 20,000 hectares of Queensland's land identified as being salt-affected and a 'significant' increase likely in salinity outbreaks, which may hit agricultural productivity."

That puts Mr Hobbs's argument to sleep forever.

Time expired.