



Speech by

Mr L. SPRINGBORG

MEMBER FOR WARWICK

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TREE-CLEARING GUIDELINES

Mr SPRINGBORG (Warwick—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (6.45 p.m.): I rise to support this motion before the House. Listening to the contributions from honourable members opposite it would be very easy to be mistaken that land-holders throughout Queensland go about deliberately degrading their land, their asset. In the time I have been a member of this Parliament, and even before, I have not come across one primary producer who has deliberately set out to degrade their asset. Why would they do that? Why would they degrade the thing that makes them viable, that allows them to make a living and survive out there in a competitive environment?

The only thing I would say is that the consequence of economic downturn, economic rationalism and the effects of commodity prices cause some land-holders not to be able to put in place as quickly as they would like remedial action for problems that may have developed over a period of time. That is the only issue I have ever been aware of. People out there are very keen to take action, but in some cases they do not have the resources or the assets to be able to do it. Why would they set out to deliberately degrade their asset, which they are hoping to pass on to their children, grandchildren and even beyond? It just does not happen, because these people need to be able to make a living.

What we are seeing from the Government is policy on the run. On the weekend the Premier came out and said that no resolution would be possible without a Commonwealth commitment to compensate owners of more than 1.5 million hectares who already held tree-clearing permits.

Do honourable members know how the tree-clearing permit system in this State works? Do they realise that we basically have two different types of land tenure and on those two different types of land tenure we have two different ways of dealing with vegetation management? On freehold land there are no restrictions, with the exception of some issues of a riparian nature with regard to clearing on the beds and banks of a watercourse or with regard to the Nature Conservation Act if there is an area of high conservation value. That is the only restriction. However, we do have very prescribed guidelines when dealing with leasehold land.

Up until Saturday this Government was talking about tree-clearing guidelines on freehold land. The Minister indicated that at some time in the future he may revisit the issue of the regional guidelines for leasehold land. That is his call. That was intended for some time in the future.

On the weekend the Premier came into this argument and threw a spanner in the works. I do not know whether it was through some sort of overt action on his part or just ignorance, but he has now said that all of those people who have jumped through the hoops, who have been assessed by the Department of Natural Resources and the Department of Environment in some circumstances against a very strict set of criteria—which lay down how many trees or what type of timber can be cleared to a certain percentage in the region—are at risk of having their tree-clearing permits revoked. How else do we read that? Not even people who have done the right thing are safe as a consequence of the way this Government is carrying on. We are seeing absolute demonisation of primary producers in this State by members opposite, who do not understand and do not care about the impact this is having on their livelihood.

In my electorate, I am aware of the actions of Landcare committees over the past 10 or 15 years that have done absolutely wonderful work, on a voluntary basis, to bring about changing attitudes

on the part of primary producers and graziers with regard to looking at sensitive areas. They have taken on those people, and they have done a really good job. One of them said to me, "Do you know what? These people have treated us with contempt. We entered into this in good faith, but we might as well have just continued to go along and not even consider the operation of Landcare." In effect, Landcare has done what we have been seeking to do tonight through this motion, that is, to introduce voluntary tree-clearing guidelines that can be assessed after a period.

This Government is treating those people with contempt. It is treating them like schoolchildren. It is not considering them as the top land managers that they are—out there preserving their most valuable asset for future generations. This Government is demonstrating appalling contempt for the primary producers and the grassroots farmers and graziers in this State. But it will be judged for its actions on this issue, because it does not understand it.

Time expired.
