



Speech by

# Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

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Hansard 10 December 1999

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

### Tree-clearing Guidelines

**Hon. P. D. BEATTIE** (Brisbane Central— ALP) (Premier) (9.32 a.m.), by leave: This week my Government released proposed new guidelines for vegetation management of freehold and leasehold land across Queensland. These guidelines were not arrived at easily. They evolved over 12 months of protracted negotiations between many stakeholders with strong interests in, and even stronger philosophies on, this issue. They included: from the rural sector—the Queensland Farmers Federation, Agforce, Canegrowers, and the Queensland Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association; from the environment sector—the Queensland Conservation Council, the Australian Conservation Foundation, the World Wide Fund for Nature and Landcare; from local government—the Local Government Association of Queensland; and from the development sector—the Urban Development Institute of Australia.

These groups were represented in a working group called the Vegetation Management Advisory Committee. I need not remind honourable members that my earlier reports to this House were of disappointment at the failure of these divergent groups to reach agreement. I would have preferred that they did. In the end, it was left to Government to resolve the impasse. And because we are a can-do Government, we did just that. The Government had to make decisions, and we did.

In this, the final sitting of the final session of Parliament of this century, I would like to put on the record some of the responses to these guidelines. I table them for the information of honourable members. Canegrowers Chairman Mr Harry Bonanno issued a media release on Wednesday headed "Canegrowers support new tree clearing legislation despite the burden". In it Mr Bonanno says—

"Queensland canegrowers today described the State Government's new Vegetation Management Bill as workable.

We've been saying for quite some time that a high degree of protection for remnant native vegetation requires a comprehensive policy which applies across all land tenure and all rural industries."

Mr Bonanno went on to say that the new guidelines meant that—

"Primary producers in other rural industries would now have to follow the lead of canegrowers in adopting farm plans and leaving remnant vegetation of high nature conservation value when developing new land."

I am pleased that a rural leader like Mr Bonanno has given these guidelines such strong endorsement. Canegrowers is now at the forefront of responsible land use management in rural and regional Queensland. Others have also commended the proposed guidelines. Richard Armstrong— head of the Queensland Farmers Federation— is quoted in this week's edition of Queensland Country Life as saying—

"I believe that farmers can agree to protect biodiversity particularly in endangered and 'of-concern' ecosystems and the costs of this in compensation to farmers is probably manageable to Governments."

Mr Armstrong made these comments prior to the release of the guidelines. The fact that they equate to our proposed solution means that we have struck the right balance. Like the Canegrowers, the

Queensland Farmers Federation has realised that these vegetation guidelines are about sustainable management in keeping with the changing values of society.

The environment movement has also recognised the value of these guidelines. Leading conservation organisation the World Wide Fund for Nature welcomed the announcement, saying that the guidelines would tackle the vast rate of vegetation destruction in Queensland. Chief Executive Officer Dr David Butcher went on to say—

"WWF congratulates Premier Beattie, and Ministers Welford and Mackenroth, on taking some tough decisions for the environment."

He said—

"With the announcement, Queensland becomes the first Government we know of to systematically identify and protect threatened ecological communities—a major achievement.

Threatened wildlife like the cassowary, mahogany glider and Proserpine rock wallaby will all benefit from these laws."

I believe that these guidelines are the start of a positive phase in modern land use management in Queensland. In coming months, I look forward to other positive reactions to these guidelines. Paramount, however, is the Commonwealth recognising its responsibilities. The response by Federal Environment Minister, Senator Hill, to the guidelines has been disappointing, to say the least. The bottom line in all of this is that the \$100m in compensation that I am seeking will go directly into the pockets of farmers. Not one cent will go into general revenue for Education, Health or any of the other needy areas. This is about natural justice for farmers. Instead of attacking the State Government, Senator Hill should explain to the farmers why he is withholding their money.

On the subject of political attacks, let me now turn to the State Opposition's outrageous claims about the information advertisements now appearing to explain the new guidelines.

**Opposition members** interjected.

**Mr BEATTIE:** The members opposite are very excitable this morning.

Let me make it clear—the Nationals and Liberals are the only ones playing politics here. These are not political advertisements. The sole message is that the State Government has new guidelines on vegetation clearing and that an information booklet has been produced to explain the detail. The Nationals and Liberals want to stop the advertisements. Why? The Nationals and Liberals also want to stop the farmers getting \$100m in compensation. One has to ask oneself: why?

I note that the Prime Minister is considering whether to meet with me to discuss the new guidelines. I am happy to meet with the Prime Minister on this issue. I am also happy to ask him why his party and his coalition partners at a State and Federal level are opposed to the guidelines and opposing the \$100m in compensation to farmers and opposing the farmers' rights to know the detail. We have the Leader of the Opposition opposing the advertisements that explain where the farmers can get access to the detail. They want to scaremonger and misrepresent those sound management guidelines.

**Opposition members** interjected.

**Mr BEATTIE:** They certainly are excitable. All they have to do is get the \$100m out their mates in Canberra. That is all they have to do: go to Canberra; get on the phone; get the \$100m out of the Commonwealth for the farmers. They have to represent the farmers for a change, instead of trying to undermine the farmers in this State.

**Mr BORBIDGE:** I rise to a point of order. That is a bit cheap coming from the man who spent \$20m on tree police and not one cent out of his own Budget on compensation.

**Mr BEATTIE:** Parliament has sat more hours in 1999 than in any other year since 1910. When it adjourns today, it will have met for 56 days in 1999 and passed a total of 90 Government Bills. We sat for a total of around 664 hours. That is an average of 11 hours and 52 minutes per day. That is at least 160 hours more than in any year between 1994 and 1998. This year has seen the largest number of Government Bills—90—since 1991. My Government has deliberately set a cracking pace this year because we are determined to make every hour of Parliament count.

**Mr HOBBS:** Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. The Premier is misleading the House. He assured the rural industries that we would debate the Vegetation Management Bill right through—

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! There is no point of order.

**Mr BEATTIE:** At the beginning of the 49th Parliament I said that we would limit the length of answers to questions in the House to three minutes. This has meant that my Ministers have answered an average of 18 questions on each sitting day. Borbidge Government Ministers answered only 13. Well, they never answered them, but they tried to answer 13. This year we have also given the

opportunity to members to introduce private members' Bills to the House. A total of 25 private members' Bills were introduced this year, and we have debated nine of them.

We have worked hard in Parliament. I can assure Queenslanders that the 50th Parliament, the first of the new millennium, will work just as hard. I will go through the details again. In terms of sitting days, 1999 will have been the most lengthy sitting calendar since 1910. This is the most hardworking Parliament since 1910—something that we can be proud of. As I said, the number of questions answered has increased. The daily average of questions answered under the Borbidge Government was 13.4. Under my Government, the daily average has been 18.1. We have passed 90 Bills. This is a can-do Government that is making the Parliament work for the people of Queensland.

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