



Speech by

Hon. R. WELFORD

MEMBER FOR EVERTON

Hansard 20 July 1999

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Land Protection

Hon. R. J. WELFORD (Everton—ALP) (Minister for Environment and Heritage and Minister for Natural Resources) (10.10 a.m.), by leave: I wish to report today on further initiatives our Government is taking to protect regional and rural communities. A much underrated threat to agricultural productivity and the environment in Queensland is the invasion of valuable pastoral land by weeds. Last week I visited western Queensland with the chairman of the Rural Lands Protection Board, Mr David Cory, to see first-hand the damage being caused by environmental weeds such as prickly acacia, mesquite, parkinsonia and rubber vine. This Government is making every effort to reclaim our valuable grazing lands, and in Hughenden I launched an initiative to help return this land to its productive potential.

The prickly acacia national containment line has been developed in conjunction with local government and Landcare groups to prevent the spread of this weed which has now been declared a weed of national significance. Prickly acacia is now threatening more than 50 million hectares of Australia's native grasslands. This containment line accelerates our efforts to safeguard extensive areas of the Lake Eyre basin and the gulf region in Queensland, in addition to large tracts of land in other States and Territories.

Prickly acacia has now infested six million hectares of western Queensland. It has the potential to spread over much of northern Australia, unless aggressive preventive measures are implemented. In particular, it threatens the sustainability of one of Australia's greatest natural grassland ecosystems—the Mitchell grass downs.

Stretching from Barcaldine north to Hughenden and west to Winton and Julia Creek, this "line in the dirt" is being established as an opportunity to safeguard valuable grazing land and significant ecosystems for future generations. Establishing this containment line is the product of 12 months' consultation by my Department of Natural Resources with land-holders, Landcare groups and local governments.

Prickly acacia growing outside the line will be eradicated in cooperative programs between land-holders and the Strategic Weed Eradication Program of the Department of Natural Resources. An education program will be used to help prevent the spread of this plant. The movement of stock is a major method of spread, and actions taken will be through a cooperative approach with land-holders and local government. Land-holders on properties within the line will be provided with skills training in a range of control techniques available for prickly acacia.

During my visit to western Queensland I was also able to inspect stock routes in Tambo, Barcaldine and Winton. These stock routes are re-emerging as a vital part of rural growth into the 21st century. They are significant in the drought-proofing they can provide and in the potential tourism benefits they bring to large tracts of land west of the Great Dividing Range. The movement of stock is just one of over 30 uses that have been identified for these modern stock routes, which cover an estimated 70,000 kilometres, or 1.5 million hectares.

The Beattie Government, with funding of \$4.2m over four years, has made upgrading of Queensland's stock route network a priority with the Stock Routes Towards 2000 Program. This current stage of the program involves drought-proofing and the establishment of new signs to let road users

and drovers know the locations of the stock routes, highway crossings and watering points. Steps are being taken to commence audits of stock routes for wildlife corridors and cultural and heritage sites in collaboration with the Environmental Protection Agency and local community groups. This Government's initiatives in regard to both environmental weeds and our stock route network reaffirm our commitment to the prosperity of regional and rural Queenslanders.
