



Speech by

Tony ELLIOTT

MEMBER FOR CUNNINGHAM

Hansard 26 August 1999

ACQUISITION OF LAND AMENDMENT BILL

Mr ELLIOTT (Cunningham—NPA) (4.27 p.m.): I wish to make a few points about this Bill in much the same vein as the member for Warrego did. Many parts of our electorates have similar problems. Over the years, we have seen situations develop where, quite frankly, the acquisition of land has created great angst and caused problems amongst many of our constituents.

My electorate has gone through this process at Millmerran with the new coalmine. Whether we like it or not, I am sure that we will experience some problems in that process in terms of the compulsory acquisition of land. As a previous speaker in this debate said, not everyone wants to give up their land. He spoke about people who had built up farms and put a lot of work into improvements and so on. Quite understandably, they are not very impressed if they are suddenly told that the Government wants to use their land for some other purpose, whether it be for a dam or whatever. We cannot blame them for being less than enthusiastic about the land acquisition process. But it is just one of those things, and people do not know when they are going to be caught up in it.

Although I am looking forward to the opening of the Millmerran coalmine and the benefits that will be reaped from it, I would not mind betting that there will be some dramas, particularly when an access has to be created for a pipeline between the Wurtulla sewerage waste treatment works at Toowoomba and the mine site. You can bet your life that some people will have their land acquired for that pipeline. Members have already seen what happened with the Westlink powerline and interconnector into New South Wales. So I have no doubt that, at some stage, we will run into some problems with that new pipeline.

I am concerned that people send out such negative messages in relation to the development of land, regardless of whether it is in respect of acquisition or otherwise. This always seems to come from the socialist side of the House. If the message is sent out that the Government is using a size 12 boot to come down on people and the people believe that they will not be able to develop anything at all, it is hardly surprising that they will overreact with respect to clearing. I believe many people have done just that.

It is obvious that the Minister in charge of this portfolio needs to listen to people in the bush. He needs to talk to them and reassure them so that they do not believe that this Government will undertake a New South Wales type exercise. I understand what went on in New South Wales. There is no doubt that some people were over-clearing. Some people do not have any empathy with the land in the long term.

My family had a small property in comparison with some other properties—some 1,300-odd acres—and we had 400 acres which had never been touched. My grandmother used to say, "The trees are for the bears." There was no arguing with her. One could tell her that it was a small pocket of land that would be good for lucerne or some other crop, but as far as she was concerned the trees were for the bears, and that was all there was to it. That was the end of the argument. As I have matured I have come to realise that her point of view was a very sound one.

If more people had my grandmother's philosophy we would have been able to link up with the area in the electorate of my colleague the member for Crows Nest where there are koala colonies in the Kelvinor area and around the Army Aviation Centre. At one stage when I was Minister we were looking at planting trees along Oakey Creek in an endeavour to link up the two koala colonies. One of the problems that the Department of National Parks identified in this area was that there was inbreeding of koalas because of the clearing that was occurring.

I want to return to the core issues of the legislation. We are talking about land acquisition which results in an increase in power. The Government will go out and acquire land for private people. Whilst everyone has always recognised the necessity of land acquisition for roads, hospitals and other public purposes, there is great danger that land might be acquired because someone thinks it is a good idea and they can make some money out of it.

Freehold tenure is a very near and dear thing as far as all members on this side of the House are concerned. In the Kimberley area of Western Australia we had large foreign-owned leasehold operations. The lessees knew that they were going to lose the lease at the end of the tenure and, as a result, they took no care of the land at all. That land was despoiled in all sorts of ways.

It is rare that we see that situation with freehold land. These are usually family operations. Other generations of the family are coming through and are taking an interest in the land. It is rare that we see those people despoil the land. Freehold land-holders are much more likely to look after their property than leaseholders. It is a fact of life.

It is great to see the development of the Landcare movement. Fortunately the movement has been above politics. Politicians have not been involved with it except to come and pose for photographs. Honourable members from both sides of the Chamber seem to be quite pleased to have their photographs taken whilst doing something useful with a Landcare group. It is just human nature. It is important that we support that movement. The movement gives Greens and people who do not own land an opportunity to do something useful. These people can get their hands dirty. They can help with tree planting programs and with catchment control programs. This type of action has brought the two different viewpoints much closer together.

If honourable members read Country Life they will see examples of where people from the city and the country are working together for the good of our streams. They are involved in restocking our streams with fish. The overall ecology of the area is benefiting. We need to understand that people with freehold tenure are more likely to look after their land. If those opposite keep pushing their philosophy of leasehold land they will find that people do not care about the land at all. Some leaseholders, of course, are excellent. Some pastoral companies—and I refer to Stanbroke in particular—have done some very good work. I am not saying that they are all rape, pillage and burn merchants. Unfortunately, human nature being what it is, we will have a percentage of leaseholders who are not interested in the land.

With those few words, I commend the Bill to the House.
