



Speech by

**VAUGHAN JOHNSON**

**MEMBER FOR GREGORY**

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### **VEGETATION MANAGEMENT BILL**

**Mr JOHNSON** (Gregory—NPA) (3.50 p.m.): I rise today to speak to this Vegetation Management Bill and, in doing so, I also put on record my opposition to this piece of legislation that all members on this side of the House have vehemently demonstrated against today. This is Peter Beattie's legislation to further try to shut down rural areas of Queensland. It is Peter Beattie who is going to wear the brunt of this at the next State election.

This debate is restricted by a Government that has demonstrated its real agenda by applying the guillotine to the democratic process. Again, we are not talking about the union bullyboys here; we are talking about kowtowing to the minority groups. My frustration at the dictatorial action of this Government pales into insignificance, however, when compared with the reaction of the people to whom the legislation is directed: the people on the land. These people have made lifetime decisions about investing in primary production, which is essential for the continued wellbeing that this and many other countries enjoy and prosper from, especially ours. They now find that this Government is going to change the rules and devalue their investment. In some cases, there is no doubt that this legislation will break up families and force them off the land. The other thing that has not been taken into account here today is the situation of some of those people. In some cases, they may have borrowed hundreds of thousands of dollars to clear and develop properties next year and upgrade their cattle, sheep or agricultural operations or whatever.

I say to the Minister today that this is a very serious situation. He referred in this House this morning to some \$22m compensation. He will spill that before breakfast when it comes to trying to buy out or compensate these people. Compensation is a poor second. Primary producers just want to run their own properties, but this Bill does not even provide any guarantee that compensation will be paid. There is no reference to compensation in the legislation. The only reference to compensation is a vague reference in the Explanatory Notes that there may be potential financial assistance to landholders. Every single stakeholder on the Vegetation Management Advisory Committee—the farmers, the greens, local government, the Urban Development Institute—all agreed that compensation was essential. The Government has ignored the unanimous advice from its very own advisory committee. The only saving grace from a regulatory approach to freehold land was promise of compensation.

I turn now to enforcement. The enforcement provisions are far in excess of those in place for leasehold land. We talk about leasehold land. The issue of freehold land is no longer sacred in the eyes of this Government. We talk about native title. It was supposed to be sacred under native title. Again, this is a blemish on this Government. It is certainly a policy that has been put in place by Beazley and implemented by the Beattie administration in Queensland.

In relation to enforcement, the Government can demand areas be rehabilitated and bill the land-holder for doing so. There are penalties of \$125,000. Land-holders would be ill advised to let these departmental officers onto their properties. The member for Nicklin made reference to these green police in the House today. He gave an excellent account of exactly what this piece of legislation is going to do to rural Queensland.

I turn to declaration of areas of high conservation value. Division 4 gives the Minister enormous powers to declare that a stated area is an area of high conservation value or is vulnerable to degradation. The definition of "destroy" in the Bill includes burning. Where does that leave producers

who need to burn off? Does that mean that the DPI's recommendations have been thrown out the door? When the member for Hinchinbrook asked the Minister for Primary Industries if he was going to table the DPI report or shred it, the Minister replied, "No, I think I had best throw it in the bin." If that is not hiding the real evidence of what the DPI is saying, I do not know what is. I say to the Minister that he should stand up and be counted on this issue, because he is hiding something.

Many people out there in rural Queensland are certainly going to be following this in the next few days with a great degree of interest to see exactly what happens in relation to the proclamation of this piece of legislation and what is going to happen in relation to compensation. The member for Kurwongbah tabled the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee's Alert Digest No. 17 just after lunch, and I want to bring some paragraphs to the Minister's attention and the attention of the House. Paragraph 1.15 states—

"The committee refers to Parliament the question of whether the restrictions and liabilities which this bill imposes upon owners of freehold land have sufficient regard to the rights of landholders, their neighbours, contractors and the community."

We talk about contractors. I say to the member for Bundaberg that not only are there contractors up in her electorate, but there are contractors right around this State who are going to go to the wall because of this piece of draconian legislation. Paragraph 1.17 states—

"The committee requests clarification from the Minister of the limitations this bill will place on the realization of income from the responsible harvesting of native timber."

Paragraph 1.40 states—

"The committee is of the view that the process of by-passing Parliamentary scrutiny by the use of statutory instruments rather than subordinate legislation disregards the institution of Parliament."

Paragraph 1.44 states—

"The committee refers to Parliament the question of whether the making, without consultation, of interim declarations of areas under cl.18 has, in the circumstances to which that clause relates, sufficient regard to the rights of affected landowners."

Paragraph 1.49 states—

"The committee refers to Parliament the question of whether the capacity of officials to issue compliance notices under cl.55 without previously giving affected persons an opportunity to make submissions, has sufficient regard to the right of such persons to natural justice."

Here we are talking about a Government that boasts having natural justice as its platform. Where is natural justice this afternoon? I say to the Premier of this State that, if he wants to be a leader, he should show some guts and direction now and come into this Chamber, shut this piece of legislation down and let it go back out to the interest groups so that the people can have their say. He should not have brought it in here at midmorning two days ago and ramrod it through here as he is doing now. The old saying is that he must have something to hide by adopting this course of action.

The list goes on and on. I refer honourable members back to 1972 under the regime of Gough Whitlam in Canberra, when he said that we do not need to grow any produce in this country; we can import everything we need. This legislation must be a continuation of that policy and that program. I can assure honourable members that people on this side of the House and the people out there in rural and regional Queensland are not going to cop this for one half of one minute, because we are going to expose precisely what this piece of legislation means to these people, what it means to the development and to the ongoing satisfaction of people in this State.

A while ago the member for Cairns talked about how she is going to look the young people of Cairns in the eye and will be able to say how "we protected that environment for you". The people who live on the land in this State and in the rest of this nation are the best environmentalists in the world. We live on one of the most fragile continents in the world. I am a product of it myself. Some years only five or six inches of rain fall, and that has to be enough for survival. If we were not good managers of the environment in that country in question, this country would have perished a long time ago. The people who live in this part of Queensland, the south-east corner, certainly would have perished with it, because no tucker would have been provided by the people who live in those places and make those sacrifices to provide the food and all the quality of life products that we take for granted today.

We are witnessing the systematic destruction of rural Queensland by the nationalisation of land. Freehold land was once sacred, but not so under this socialist regime. Labor is pursuing this evil agenda by trying to appeal to our natural wish to protect our land for the generations that follow. My proposition is that, on the whole, there are no better conservationists than the family unit or the operation of those western pastoral aggregations that are going about their jobs responsibly. I heard the member for Callide say today that his forefathers and everybody else's forefathers did not destroy the environment, because they wanted it for their kids. Today's farmers want it for their grandkids and

their great grandchildren, too. The Labor Government is peddling this takeover of people's farms on the basis of reducing the greenhouse gases. Where are the greenhouse gases coming from? I see in the gallery today the lady who has probably had more input into this legislation than anyone else, Ms Imogen Zethoven. Minority groups are not consulting with the most responsible people. It is about time that those groups, the Minister and his Government started to recognise that the majority of people are responsible and are doing the right thing.

However, millions of people are dumping every type of poison into our rivers and oceans. What is Labor's answer to that? It is doing nothing about it, because it is in its own electorates. If it can kick somebody in the guts, it will kick a rural community. It will try to send them broke so it can put them all on the social programs that Labor in the city is accustomed to and hope that those people will vote Labor. They will not vote Labor. We will fight the battle for them to make absolutely certain that we have full retention of what they have. What ever happened to the workers in all this? We talk about 5% unemployment. The employment figure is currently 8.7%. It is coming back a bit. I hope it comes back. All on this side of the House hope it comes back. Do Labor members think about the land-clearing contractors? Do they think about the blokes who drive those tractors? Do they think about the fuel operators, the blokes who supply the fuel? Do they think about the people who are doing all the hard yards behind the scenes in some of those rural communities? No, they just want to shut them down.

The wool industry is on its knees. Shearers are out of work across the nation. They are some of the few people who were making up the guts of rural towns. This is another nail in the coffin of rural and regional Queensland. I am not going to stand for it. I know my colleagues will not stand for it. What happened to the philosophy of those rural workers who gathered under the tree of knowledge outside the Barcaldine Railway Station? They were ambushed by the social engineers and Labor Lawyers of this State, who people have no affiliation with the blue collar workers. They have hijacked the workers' agenda through their cunning policies. Those are the very people whom Labor has shown through this legislation it does not trust to look after one another. This is the side of the House that will stand up for business. This is the side of the House that will stand up for the worker. We will do it with pride and demonstrate that clearly come the next State election.

This is where we, the real workers' party, differ from the imposters on the other side. We believe that with the right information and the right incentives the people of regional and rural Queensland would be in a position to reverse the long-term decline in the extent of our native vegetation cover. I also believe that it would be possible to develop effective measures to manage vegetation. We were a long way along that path before the Labor Government had to suck up to the conservationists and the non-productive sectors. I hope members in this House will realise the mistake they have made. If the Government continues to be hell-bent—

**A Government member** interjected.

**Mr JOHNSON:** Somebody raised the issue of homosexuals. I will draw on that for a moment, too.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr D'Arcy): Order! That has nothing to do with the Bill.

**Mr JOHNSON:** They are interjecting on me. I will say this. We talk about—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I will protect the member for Gregory.

**Mr JOHNSON:** I can look after myself. That is one thing I have always been able to do.

If the Government continues hell-bent down the path of destruction, the issue of adequate compensation arises. There seems to be some debate about where the compensation comes from and a lot of politicking about it. If the Government is going to get that compensation going, I point out that it cannot be a one-off thing. It has to be ongoing, ongoing, ongoing. People in rural areas are the ones who are being penalised.

**Mr Hayward:** Get to your mates in Canberra.

**Mr JOHNSON:** I do not care where Labor gets the money from. However, it is Labor that is introducing the legislation, and it is Labor that will be responsible for that compensation. We know that the Treasurer cannot pay it from the current Budget, because, like Old Mother Hubbard, the Treasurer has to admit that the cupboard is bare. Perhaps that DPI report has more truth in it than this Government wants to admit to. In fact, we know that the Bankcard also has \$1 billion on it. Labor has raided all the hollow logs and has even had to rip off the superannuation funds of public servants. If the Premier's argument with Canberra has any validity, it is on the grounds that the other States have already substantially cleared their rural land. What does that tell us about land-holders in Queensland? It tells us that they have been conserving our natural vegetation better than any other State in the Commonwealth. In appreciation they are to be hammered by this draconian legislation, which in effect is retrospective, because it now changes the value and carrying capacity of holdings upon which finance may have been advanced. Ultimately, the long-term result will be bankruptcy.

We all know what is likely to happen now. Those financial Draculas will revise their estimates of the worth of those properties. The compensation bin had better be full enough to recompense each and every land-holder who suffers financially because of this Bill. There are families who are distraught at the way this whole thing has been handled. I have numerous families in my electorate ringing me every minute wanting to know what is happening. They want to know when this legislation will be proclaimed. They ask what we are doing; what is happening. I say to the Minister that that responsibility is his. Those people are ringing at all hours of the day and night. If the Premier were fair dinkum, he would be paying compensation for the pain and suffering that he is causing right now. I say to the Premier: pull this legislation and redefine the amendments to protect the majority, not kowtow to the minority groups.

It is appropriate to remind this House of the words of that famous American President Abraham Lincoln who once said, "Destroy the cities and the country will rebuild them. Destroy the country and grass will grow on the streets." Members of the Labor administration will want to ensure that those words have left an indelible mark on their minds. Each and every one of them needs the rural areas to survive. They should not think for one moment that the rural areas think that they do not need the city, because they do. We need each other. These socialist policies that Labor is implementing under the guidelines of minority groups are detrimental to the financial and developmental gain of the future generations of this State. This is a sad day. As one member of this Parliament said here this afternoon, it will certainly be a sad Christmas for many people in rural and regional Queensland.

I just hope and pray that the year 2000 will bring some sanity to this place. While Labor occupies the Treasury benches it should show some leadership. It should admit that it has made a mistake in relation to this issue, revisit this piece of legislation and correct the anomalies that lie within it. That will hopefully stop hundreds of country people from going bankrupt as a result of this draconian legislation that Labor is responsible for.

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