



Speech by

Hon. V. LESTER

MEMBER FOR KEPPEL

Hansard 9 & 10 December 1999

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT BILL

Hon. V. P. LESTER (Keppel—NPA) (11.37 p.m.): Today marks one of the darkest days in the history of Queensland and of this Parliament. In recent days, we have witnessed one of the most blatant attacks on the democratic process as the Beattie Labor Government has used its majority to gag debate on a series of important pieces of legislation.

Earlier in the day we debated a Bill dealing with water—a very important issue for country people. That Bill was gagged. It is very shameful to have to go back to our constituents in the country and tell them that, on the very important issue of water, we were unable to put our points across in relation to the clauses because we were unceremoniously gagged.

I refer also to what has been happening in recent times with regard to amendments being brought into the House at the last minute. We have had little time to study the total ramifications of all of those amendments, particularly when so many other amendments are consequential. We could see further difficulties down the track because obviously these amendments were not properly studied in the first place.

To cover its own inadequacies, its own dismal performance, its lack of organisation and its lack of openness and transparency—contrary to the commitments given to the member for Nicklin—the Beattie Government has come into this House and sought to avoid the scrutiny it so definitely deserves. The Government made a promise and has now gone outside that promise.

The Vegetation Management Bill is an extremely important Bill and it needs time for consideration and lead-up. There has been some time in the lead-up, but not everything had been agreed upon—far from it—and the legislation has been rushed into this House without having been properly thought out. There has been no consideration given to the consequences which might follow. In 25 years as a member of the Legislative Assembly, I cannot recall witnessing such a contemptuous performance as that which we are witnessing here tonight, and in recent days, from the Beattie Labor Government.

To apply the gag to 10 other pieces of legislation was bad enough. That showed contempt not only for the parliamentary process but also for all of those people who had an interest in that legislation and who approached the Opposition members to have their concerns raised in this place. Unfortunately, we will have to tell our constituents that we could not raise all of their concerns. The Government has indeed stifled parliamentary debate. However, as a Government, it has also stifled community input into the parliamentary process that underpins our democratic processes. Now, for the Government to introduce legislation so significant, so wide ranging and with so many implications such as the Vegetation Management Bill, it has scaled new heights in its contempt for rural and regional Queensland.

Indeed, the Bill was released to the stakeholders and introduced to the House only yesterday. From our understanding, it was to be supported comprehensively by a prescriptive policy under which regional frameworks would be worked out. We do not have that. We have not had time to assess the full implications of this Bill, nor has rural industry. I have to say that, quite frankly, we do not really know what we are voting on, because we do not have the finer details.

Mr Hobbs: It's a bit like buying a motor car sight unseen.

Mr LESTER: Very definitely. If we buy a new motor car sight unseen, it might be all right, but here, we do not quite know what we are buying. We do not know whether we are buying a model T Ford, a new Buick or something that we cannot afford. It is a pretty poor state of affairs.

We have not been provided with a copy of the State policy. Despite being promised it yesterday, by this afternoon rural industry still had not been provided with that policy. So we do not have the policy, but we are passing a Bill. For goodness' sake, what an outrage! We are being asked to vote on one of the most significant Bills this decade, yet we have not had adequate time to consider it and have not been provided with all the information. Honestly, I cannot believe that we would be given this Bill here and not be given the policy. It is just absurd. This is nothing but pure political treachery. It is treason of the highest order. On that basis, the Beattie Government cannot hope to win the Opposition's support for this Bill, nor has it won that support.

Since the Beattie Government came to office 18 months ago, rural and regional Queensland has suffered at the hands of Labor's Left Wing ideology and preference for spin doctoring and emotion over—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr D'Arcy): Order! The honourable member says that he has been here 25 years. I am well aware of that fact. He should be able to speak to the Bill in the second-reading debate. I would appreciate it if he did so and stopped sledging.

Mr LESTER: Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank you for that. I do not accept the word "sledging"; I am purely stating fact.

Already, we have witnessed Labor sell out south-east Queensland's native hardwood industry; the 1,500 workers who depend directly on that industry for their jobs; the thousands of others who support that industry; the graziers, the beekeepers and other industries who depend on the forests; the recreational users; the rural and regional communities who depend on forest industries for employment, income, rates and services; and the economy of this State. Labor sold out that industry and it is set to close it down in exchange for a handful of green preferences at election time. The timber industry was dragged with a gun to its head to accept Labor's terms or be closed down overnight. The rest of the stakeholders and the community were completely shut out.

So much for consultation! So much for open and accountable Government! We witnessed the Treasurer—the gambler who, unlike Kenny Rogers, does not know when to fold them or when to hold them—make scurrilous and absolutely baseless allegations that farmers' wives would take the farm truck to town to do the shopping so as to rip off the diesel fuel rebate. We witnessed the Natural Resources Minister make similar, scurrilous, totally untrue allegations—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr D'Arcy): Order! I have called the honourable member to task once on the subject. The Bill is specific.

Mr LESTER: I would like to suggest very, very much indeed that the campaign started with the Minister for Natural Resources giving selected metropolitan media private briefings on land clearing so as to mount a jaundiced and inaccurate account of land management in this State. That campaign continued with the selected leaking of more jaundiced accounts of the land management practices employed by hardworking primary producers. That campaign culminated in the Premier's infamous policy-making plane trip to Charters Towers, where he made the grand assessment that the State was on fire as a result of so-called panic clearing.

Indeed, that was policy making from the comfort of a leather chair in the Government jet 40,000 feet off the ground. The Premier, under the illusion that he has to claim how good he believes he is, was apparently so good that he thought that, from 40,000 feet up in the clouds, he could differentiate between bushfires, maintenance fires, the burning of pulled timber, panic clearing and properly planned clearing. He even claimed to be able to differentiate between freehold and leasehold land. The Premier does not seem to know that the use of fire as a land management tool was around hundreds of years before white settlement. Aborigines used fire for many of the same reasons as graziers do now. The Premier does not seem to know that, at this time of the year, it is standard management practice for graziers to burn off the dead and matted pasture to allow the regeneration of new growth in the wet season. The Premier does not seem to know that, in terms of those fires that may have been related to clearing, farmers have to allow the timber to dry before they can burn it. The Premier does not seem to know that, of those fires that may have been related to clearing, most of that clearing would have been done at least two years ago under permits issued by the State Government. Those profound observations from the Premier—and I will not say "Biggles"—removed the little credibility that his Government may ever have had.

The Premier's comments, which were extremely inaccurate, were made to really fire up the people of Queensland. If one flies from Charters Towers towards Moranbah or Clermont, one would see that those places where some of those fires were reported to have occurred—properties such as Bulliwallah and so on—are either pastoral lease or leasehold. They are not freehold at all. That is the amazing thing about this whole issue. The Premier's carry-on made great headlines. However, most of

the properties involved were leasehold upon which there are Government guidelines. Those properties were most likely burning off, because that is what happens at this time of the year at Bulliwallah and some of those other stations.

It is obvious that the premise of this Bill is not based on science and it is not based on fact; it is based on emotive scaremongering and policy on the run. In his second-reading speech, the Minister referred to the actions of the ill-fated Goss Labor Government in relation to tree-clearing restrictions on leasehold land. The Minister seems to have forgotten the appalling mismanagement of that issue by his Labor predecessors; he seems to have forgotten the ensuing rural revolt; and he seems to have forgotten the street protest outside the Cabinet meeting held in Emerald. It may be news to the Minister, but primary producers have not forgotten. They will not forget the latest and most dramatic assault on their right to earn a living from their own land and to manage it according to sound practices.

One has to pay a lot of money to buy freehold land. A freehold title means that it is one's land entirely to do with as one wishes, responsibly. People who pay hundreds of thousands of dollars for the privilege of doing with the land as they wish do just that: they act responsibly. If they did not, it would devalue their land. It would not be worth as much. They will look after the land as best they possibly can. I have visited many freehold properties and it has been my experience that the land is treated with care and pride. That is something to behold. Of course, now land-holders will have a rope put around their necks. They will not be able to clear their land as they wish in order to increase their income. I have a problem if people have purchased property knowing that additional land had to be cleared but they now find that they might not be able to do that. In other words, with a stroke of the Government's pen, they have lost money.

The coalition has not forgotten that the Bill represents an attack on the principles of land ownership that have underpinned the State for decades. The Bill totally disregards the fact that freehold tenure is the most secure tenure available. It ignores the fact that land-holders have paid a premium for that tenure and, in doing so, have bought absolute ownership of that land, including the vegetation that grows on it. It ignores the fact that freehold title holders have a right to manage their own land and to conduct agricultural activities as they see fit. It ignores the fact that the vast and overwhelming majority of land-holders are not in the business of destroying the land because they depend upon it for their livelihoods and the livelihoods of their children, their grandchildren, their great grandchildren and all those who will come after them.

This Bill is based on the grossly inaccurate and arrogant belief of the Labor Party that land-holders need to be told what is good for them. It is based on the belief that they need the Government and the bureaucracy to impose punitive and proscriptive laws to direct how they manage their land and conduct their businesses. I can see a time coming when lots of public servants will have to inspect properties. People will make applications to them, and it will depend upon the individual public servant whether those applications will be processed. There will be considerable time delays. Knowing the way that red tape can gather, the process will go on and on. The people will lose heart. I have no doubt that many people will walk off their properties as a result of what is in store for them.

The Bill is based on the premise that only the Government can manage land responsibly. That is laughable from the Beattie Government's atrocious record of environmental management.

I wonder what is going on. When the Transport Department was building a trailer park in the Rosslyn Bay—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr D'Arcy): Order! Again I ask the member to address the Bill. He has been doing very well and he will continue to do so.

Mr LESTER: I asked with all due respect for three native Norfolk pine trees to be left on site. They were on a mound and could have been shifted. They smashed them down. That was a dreadful thing. I mention it in this debate, because while one department is doing one thing another department legislates in a different way. I will return to the Bill, but I had to make that point.

The Government cannot manage properly the land it already owns, but it continues to buy up more national parks and lock up more forests. The Government has presided over an explosion of weeds and feral animals in our national parks. This Government has handed down one of the worst environmental budgets ever, with \$28.4m cut from this year's Environmental Protection Agency budget alone.

The Bill represents an expectation that rural Queensland and our primary producers are once again expected to shoulder the burden of the environmental demands of urban populations and, indeed, a city-centred Beattie Government. This is a divisive Bill and the Beattie Government's handling of this issue has been divisive. It has been malicious and destructive. Far from being the Government for all Queenslanders, the Premier and his Government have sought to drive a wedge between the city and the bush. The Bill clearly splits the treatment of rural land from urban development. It allows widespread tree clearing on Crown and private land in urban areas for roads, housing developments and shopping centres to go on virtually unchecked, even though that might be good sugar land,

strawberry land or whatever, while primary producers who own freehold land will be subjected to onerous and proscriptive restrictions.

The Beattie Government has talked often of the need for primary producers to operate under certainty. However, it confuses certainty with the dead hand of regulation. With the hysteria and the emotion that has been whipped up by the Beattie Government in its campaign to introduce these new laws, science has been ignored and all the perspective has been lost.

Documentary evidence produced by respected ecologists such as Dr Bill Burrows and other records indicate that there are now more trees in the State than when Captain Cook sailed up the east coast.

Mr Mackenroth: Fair dinkum!

Mr LESTER: A learned person has suggested that, and it has come from research. That type of scientific advice has not been sought out when developing this Bill.

There are seven million hectares of woodlands in Queensland. Even based on the Minister's figures that some 340,000 hectares are being cleared annually, that figure is a mere fraction of the total number of trees in this State. There is no indication as to just how much of that 340,000 hectares is regrowth and how much is virgin timber. Even though we are debating the Bill, we are not sure what is what. The satellite data cannot determine the difference between regrowth and virgin timber. Even on those figures, the clearing rate represents just 0.005% of Queensland's woodlands. That gives one food for thought in no uncertain terms.

However, that has not stopped the Minister from misusing the figures and trying to paint a picture in the city that the farmers and graziers are clearing every tree in this State. The whole issue has been whipped up and overrated. I believe that it is all about making the bush people look bad, which helps votes in the city. I hate to say that, but I can only think that that is what is happening.

The Bill is based on the mistaken premise that Queensland is in the same situation as the southern States of Victoria, South Australia and New South Wales where all the trees have already been cleared and there is no regrowth problem. It ignores the fact that our climate is different; that our rain falls predominantly in the summer months; that our soil types are different and that clay subsoils in many areas will severely limit the sorts of salinity problems that we have seen develop interstate. But the Bill also ignores the necessity to manage vegetation and to control regrowth so as to maintain the viability of our rural lands. The Bill will have a massive economic and social impact on rural and regional Queensland. It will act as another means of stifling the development of regional and rural Queensland, which has already been stifled through this Beattie Government's freeze on water infrastructure developments. The Bill, with its prescriptive and onerous controls, will strangle the productivity of primary producers. That worries me terribly. These people will feel as though they are pulling a trailer behind them.

Hon. V. P. LESTER (Keppel—NPA) (10.30 a.m.), continuing: I have to query one matter right at this very point. The DPI has produced a report that clearly contains some very bad news for the taxpayer. It says that the cost of these arbitrary controls, which rob the people of property value and which rob them of ongoing production income, is massive, and the DPI knows this; it has told the Government and the Government does not want to know. A moment ago we saw the Minister for Primary Industries saying that the best thing to do with this report is to throw it in the bin. For goodness' sake, what is this Government doing? I have to ask: what is this Government doing? A report has been handed down which goes against what the Government wants to do to try to appease the conservationists and the Government says, "Throw it in the bin." That is an indicator to what they think of the rural people.

I have never seen such a terrible attitude towards our country people—never in all of my days have I seen such contempt for country people. A report says that the tree-clearing vegetation framework will put people out of business and will not be good for rural industry, and the Government says, "Throw it in the bin." That is how much it really cares. But it goes further than that. Because the report does not equate with what he would wish it to say, he is saying that it is politically motivated. Never in all of my years have I heard a Premier calling a report from a department within the Government of which he is the Premier "politically motivated". I believe that what has happened here this morning is so serious that we should, indeed, postpone this debate until next year when we will have had time to discuss the implications of the report from the very reputable Department of Primary Industries.

I have to ask also about the fine detail of the Bill. We have not got the fine detail yet. Where is it? That is what I am asking. The Government does not seem to want to know about it.

Government members interjected.

Mr LESTER: And they start laughing! That is what they think of country people. The Premier does not care about them. He says that the DPI report is politically motivated. In spite of promises to the contrary we have not got the detail of the Bill. We do not really know what we are voting on. This Bill is basically a framework and then there is the fine detail of how it will work. Ultimately, the Minister will have the final say. So we are debating a Bill that is going to severely affect the people in rural industry; it will affect them very, very badly and throw many of them out of business. The Government is saying that the Bill is going to be passed anyway. It is not even allowing the debate to continue at length; at half past 4 today, it will hit it on the head with an axe. That is how much the Government cares about what we have been trying to do.

I have never, ever been so absolutely disgusted with the approach of a Government and its attitude towards the bush. I cannot believe what I have heard here this morning and I cannot believe that we are proceeding with this Bill when we do not know the fine policy. How does the Government think the rural people are feeling? People are phoning me telling me that they have never been so sold out. I really am at a loss for words to describe what has happened here this morning. Fancy a Premier saying that a report from the DPI, for which he is responsible through his Primary Industries Minister, that he does not want is politically motivated! I have never heard the likes of this. It is a sad, sad, sad day for rural people in Queensland.

Even before this Bill has been passed, it has already had an impact. It is having an impact, just as happened in New South Wales where the Labor Government introduced similar draconian tree-clearing restrictions on rural land. Decisions and millions of dollars of investment have already been put on hold. I am sure my colleagues will relate some of the instances occurring in their own electorates during this debate.

I cannot believe it. Agforce cites just one major bank which lost \$5m in business alone in south-east Queensland last week because investors feared the introduction of these draconian tree-clearing restrictions. That is before we heard all these goings-on this morning. Things are going to be much worse when all of this gets out.

In regions throughout Queensland, reports are already flowing in that undeveloped properties are not selling at anywhere near the price they should be because primary producers know that they will not be able to develop them to their full productive potential. What a thing to happen! They think they are going along okay in spite of droughts and whatever and all of a sudden, through an action of a Labor Government that hates the rural people, their properties are devalued to the point at which they might not even be able to sell them. That is how much they have been devalued. The Government is really hurting the rural people in no uncertain terms. It is pitting the rural people against the city people, which seems to be the way it wants to go.

Developed properties, on the other hand, are going up in value. They are going up because they have been developed. They are the lucky ones. What is really happening is that this Government is making rural property owners' financial situation subject to a lottery draw. Only on the weekend the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority released advice that forecast over 800 Queensland families will be forced to leave the land this year because of declining terms of trade and poor commodity prices. A Queensland Legal Aid lawyer stated in the Courier-Mail that he believed the figure was even higher and that up to 2,600 farm families are in severe financial trouble and that they may yet have to leave the land.

This Bill will only exacerbate the situation for primary producers already battling poor prices and rising costs. It will curtail their ability to develop their properties to their productive potential, service their loans and keep their businesses viable. Does this Government not understand that, if they keep a property viable, they make a profit and employ somebody? I do not know how many times we have to say that to get it through the heads of Government members.

This Bill will see even more farm families forced off the land. That will be a shocking indictment of the Beattie Labor Government and it will leave a terrible legacy to this State and to young Queenslanders who hope to have a future in primary industry. We see so many of these young people are so keen to get out on the land, so keen to develop and so keen to employ people, but all of a sudden they have been cut down with a stockwhip. That is what the Government has done to them. It would be remiss of me not to mention my deep disappointment with the response of the Minister for Primary Industries when my colleague the member for Crows Nest asked him what approaches had been made to the banks to address what will be the results of the passage of this Vegetation Management Bill.

The Minister has either a distinct lack of interest in the plight of primary industries that he is supposed to represent or else he is captive to Labor's Left and green ideology, just as the Deputy Premier has proven to be. They have not stood up to the Greens. They have not stood up to the conservationists. As a result, we are where we are today. Judging by his inability or unwillingness to answer that question, the Minister has made no representations to those financial institutions on behalf of Queensland's primary producers. There is no other explanation. That is not good enough.

What will the exodus from rural Queensland cost the State in terms of lost productivity, lost jobs, lost exports and added welfare costs? We do not know fully, because the Beattie Government has not released the social and economic impacts of this Bill. The Opposition has been informed that the Department of Primary Industries has at least a preliminary idea of the impact. We have since discovered that they have more than a preliminary idea; they have a report that is not good news for the Government. It has been suggested that the Minister for Primary Industries should put that report into the bin.

Mr Cooper: It is tantamount to shredding it.

Mr LESTER: They will tear it into shreds. Apparently the report confirms our projections that there will be a significant impact, but the Minister has suggested that we shred the information. I cannot believe what I am hearing. What does the Government have to hide? Why will the Government not stand up for the primary producers—just for once—the people whom it is supposed to represent, and release that information so that we can have at least some idea of the impact of its new tree-clearing guidelines.

I challenge the Minister to withdraw the Bill now. I suggest that we do not proceed with it until such time as all the assessments have been dealt with.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr D'Arcy): Order! The repetition is becoming tedious.

Mr LESTER: I think the people in the bush want me to respond.

The other night in this Parliament the Government voted against—

Mr Sullivan interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Chermside!

Mr LESTER: Mr Deputy Speaker, it is unfortunate that the member for Chermside does not seem to understand the plight of those in the bush.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I do not need any help from the member for Keppel.

Mr LESTER: The other night in this Parliament the Government voted against the coalition's attempt to restore some balance to the Government's handling of this issue and to investigate the impacts that its new guidelines will have before rushing in and introducing these new laws. The members opposite have consistently put the Labor Party machine before the interests of the people. That is a slight on rural electorates by the members opposite who purport to represent them. They have proven on this issue, as they did on the RFA, that they are the Government's representatives in the electorates, not the electorates' representatives in the Government. That is of great concern.

The coalition supports sustainable land management, just as primary producers do. The difference between those on this side and those on the other side is that we do not treat rural people with contempt. We believe that primary producers are the best custodians of the land. They care for it. They paid for it, and they want to look after it. The vast and overwhelming majority of farmers manage their properties and their land in a sustainable but very productive way. We do not support mandatory prescriptive tree-clearing restrictions, so we cannot support this Bill. We support voluntary codes of practice that are based on science and best management practices. That is what we were developing in partnership with primary industry when we were in Government, and that is what we remain committed to doing.

I am reminded again of the Minister's second-reading speech in which he almost fondly recalled the abysmal handling of the introduction of tree-clearing guidelines for leasehold land. The Goss Government never finished that process. All the Goss Government did was create one enormous, bureaucratic, bungled, prescriptive mess. The Borbidge Government inherited that mess, just as it inherited so many other messes from the Goss Government, and so we set about fixing it. The Borbidge Government actually worked in partnership with rural industry to introduce sensible guidelines which were, in significant part, supported by leaseholders. That is not to say that there have not been some isolated problems. There have been, but they have been able to be addressed at the local level by producers and by local DNR officers. The dead hand of bureaucracy was not hanging over leasehold land.

Those guidelines are practical and they have worked. The greenhouse data proves it and so do the official statistics that show a drop in clearing levels of 12%. Those guidelines were formulated on the basis of extensive consultation with local land-holders, who know the country best, and on science. But the restrictions proposed in this Bill go much further than those guidelines. The new freehold restrictions are heavily prescriptive and against the clear wishes of rural industry. They are far more prescriptive than the present leasehold guidelines. In fact, those new restrictions will override the existing, regionally based leasehold guidelines.

The real risk now exists that the Beattie Government will, in fact, review and even revoke existing leasehold tree-clearing permits that have been issued by the State Government. Goodness me! Imagine revoking something that we already have; talk about being treated badly! There is no

question about it. The Minister has admitted that he wants to review the leasehold framework and to make it even tougher. That is what the conservationists have demanded. That is what is starting to happen in some areas of Queensland already, as the DNR assessment process grinds to a halt. Unfortunately, this Bill paves the way for the whole process to grind to a halt and cause more concern to those people who are trying to develop their properties and pay their taxes in this great State of Queensland.

Why is the Minister reviewing those guidelines and introducing a far more prescriptive and heavy-handed regulation to bludgeon rural industry when the existing guidelines have already cut clearing rates by 12%? I do not think the Minister knows the reason himself. The Bill allows the State to amend the leasehold guidelines to make the standards consistent with new freehold controls. It is claimed that existing permits will not be affected, but what about those hundreds of applications that have already been submitted and are awaiting processing? I have to ask: what about them? Some of those applications have been awaiting processing for nearly 12 months. Mr Deputy Speaker, can you imagine it? They have been waiting 12 months. How on earth can people make investments, improve their land and organise loans in those circumstances?

Mr Hegarty: It is outrageous.

Mr LESTER: It is absolutely outrageous. Investment decisions have been made on the basis of their approval under the existing arrangements. Now they find that that has all been changed. People need certainty. Will they be assessed under the old leasehold guidelines process or the new prescriptive control system? I would just about put my money on their being assessed under the new policy. If the Minister can promise me otherwise, I call on him now to do so. In introducing these overly prescriptive tree-clearing restrictions on freehold land and imposing the same new restrictions on leasehold land, the Beattie Government has abandoned the very clear distinction between freehold and leasehold tenures. That is a clear assault on the land tenure system of this State. It is endemic to Labor's socialist ideology on property rights.

Under the new freehold tree-clearing restrictions, tree clearing of the so-called of concern species—such as brigalow, gidgee, poplar box and bloodwood—would be prohibited. That alone would lock up 4.3 million hectares across the State of both freehold and leasehold land, including 2.25 million hectares in the highly productive brigalow belt.

A mandatory minimum level of 30% of pre-1788 vegetation cover has been set as the arbitrary benchmark, regardless of the species type, the regional situation or the local geography. I am calling for this Bill to be suspended until all of these issues have been decided. That figure has not been set scientifically. It has been plucked out of the air by an idealistic Government that kowtows to an extreme ideology.

Applied regionally, that arbitrary figure could mean that a land-holder who has not yet developed their property but who may have intentions of doing so could be prevented from clearing any of their property. Can members imagine that? They will not be able to proceed to make their property viable or sustainable.

No clearing will be permitted within 200 metres of rivers, 50 metres of creek banks and 20 metres of gullies. A gully is defined as anything that runs water at some time. In many parts of Queensland that definition and the prescriptive limits set will prevent any clearing at all. There are a lot of regions like that in Queensland, so we do not know where we are going. Some properties may have a lot of gullies and will not be able to clear at all.

Regrowth controls of many species will be heavily controlled or banned, regardless of the implications for property viability or regional issues. These arbitrary benchmarks do not stack up scientifically or economically, and the Beattie Government should know it. The Opposition's office has already started to log calls from scientists and other experts who hold deep concerns about the Beattie Government's decision on tree clearing. Some of those calls are even from within the Government. Members need to know that. It will not matter to them what is within the Government after the Government shreds the DPI report. Just as with the RFA, the Government has ignored the experts and has focused solely on implementing flawed idealistic policy driven out of the office of the Premier and Cabinet on the whims of the greens—the dark suits in horn-rimmed glasses who helped to establish the Goss Government's reputation as a wrecker of rural and regional economies.

How does the Beattie Government hope to administer such a prescriptive system of regulations and controls, especially if it does not have the support of primary producers? Conservative estimates have put the bare minimum cost of administering a tree-clearing framework on freehold land at \$5m. That is quite apart from the enormous compensation costs, which I will come to in more detail shortly. I understand, however, that the administration figure could well turn out to be much higher.

The coalition established during the Estimates committee hearings that the Beattie Government has no spare money. The Minister and the Treasurer both admitted it.

Mr HAMILL: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. The honourable member is misleading the House. In fact, I answered a question on this matter yesterday and I said—

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

Mr HAMILL: Mr Deputy Speaker, the honourable member is saying that there are no contingencies in relation to compensation. I made the point very clearly that the Government always provides for contingencies, and contingencies are provided in the Budget.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is still no point of order, but it was good to hear the explanation.

Mr Springborg: It was a dodgy explanation anyway.

Mr LESTER: And wasting time in the debate. Somehow the Premier has promised \$20m for administrative purposes. I have to ask where that money is coming from.

Just as Labor Governments always do, without fail, the Beattie Government has already frittered away the sound economic position in which the Borbidge Government left this State. It has exhausted nearly all of the hollow logs. It has sold off the TAB and the Bank of Queensland. There is not much more for it to sell off—except the power industry, and I do not think anybody wants to buy it at the moment. This is not a bare minimum approach. This is a heavily prescriptive and unduly regulatory system which will cost more than \$5m to administer. It may even cost more than \$50m.

On top of that there will be claims for compensation, and rightly so. There will be claims for compensation for lost property values where the controls under this Bill restrict the development potential of properties and tie up properties on which clearing may still be possible in an endless mass of red tape and bureaucracy. Will compensation be paid for the depreciation of property values? Will it be paid for lost earning potential? It should be. Will it be paid when a bank forecloses on a mortgage? No-one knows.

The only mention of compensation in the Bill is a vague reference in the Explanatory Notes to potential financial assistance to land-holders. What sort of way to bring in a Bill is that? People do not know whether or not they will be compensated. They have no idea what is going to happen to them. It is an awful thing to do. There is nothing definite. There are no specific principles on which compensation will be paid. This is yet another sell-out of the bush. Compensation is not even mentioned in the Bill. What a way to treat country people!

Land-holders are expected to cop these laws on a wing and a prayer from the Beattie Government—the same Government that has not put one solitary cent towards compensation; the same Government that expects the Federal Government to clean up its mess, to pay the bills for its punitive laws with no notice.

No Government and no business person could possibly be expected to take seriously the sort of approach we have seen from the Beattie Government. The Premier's approach to the Federal Government, if we could grant it the decency of calling it that, was nothing short of an unmitigated publicity stunt. We should think about that for a moment. On Saturday night the Premier faxed off a demand for \$100m from the Federal Government, and he expected a response within 24 hours. People who put forward plans for land clearing have to wait for up to 12 months, yet the Beattie Government expects a huge financial contribution within 24 hours. The Premier then called a media conference. What sort of a game is he playing?

It is little wonder that the Federal Government has refused to play the Premier's silly games. Does the Premier think Senator Hill carries a couple of hundred million dollars around in his back pocket on the off-chance that a State Premier wants some cheap publicity over the weekend and a quick \$100m to pay for a mess of the Premier's own making? The Premier has no intention of conducting himself in a statesmanlike and professional manner. In fact, it is a slight on the word "statesman" to use it in the same sentence as "the Queensland Premier".

In any event, how did the Premier arrive at the figure of \$100m? I bet he does not know. It was not based on the DPI's advice of the cost of the social and economic impacts of these laws, because the Government has not read the report. I understand that it has been shredded or that it will be. The Government is not even going to look at it. It was not based on the Department of Natural Resource's assessment of the projected property value depreciations; it was, according to the Premier's warped logic, based on the crudest of principles.

The Federal Government has a \$580m bucket of money for the Natural Heritage Trust. There are six States so, the Premier claims, Queensland should get one sixth of that figure. That is \$100m. The Premier has put the cart before, in this case, the House with this entire Bill—no more so than on the compensation issue. \$100m is a drop in the ocean of the millions of dollars that the Bill will rip out of rural and regional Queensland.

I thought the principle of compensation was to pay people for losses actually incurred. That would seem a fair thing to do. The Premier obviously has very different ideas. He has no intention of

paying compensation for actual losses incurred. His silly stunt with the Federal Government exposes that. This Bill and its silence on the principles for compensation payment confirms this.

Mr Sullivan: Give Hansard a go, will you.

Mr LESTER: In any event, in this entire debate the Premier has missed the point of compensation. Give Hansard a go? If you characters did not act in such a way—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I have been very patient.

Mr LESTER: He did interject, Mr Deputy Speaker. Compensation is a poor second best as far as land-holders are concerned. Those opposite have missed that crucial fact, which will help bring about their downfall in rural and regional electorates around Queensland. Primary producers do not want to be compensated so they can be buried in a gold-lined coffin. They do not want that. They want and deserve the right to manage their properties within the parameters of accepted sustainable practices. They want the right to manage their land and hand it on to their children to manage that land as well. There is no need for hundreds of millions of dollars in compensation if only the Beattie Government would follow the lead of the Borbidge Government and if only it would follow its own policy to introduce voluntary guidelines with incentives. We need incentive for the bush. That is what we need—incentive. That is what the Borbidge Government was working towards and that is what it will work towards when we take Government again and rescind this atrocious legislation.

We have heard claims from the Government that there will be no moratorium on tree clearing on freehold land. What unmitigated rubbish! This Bill introduces a moratorium of grand proportions. The so-called transition provisions are nothing more than a moratorium on tree clearing. From the date of proclamation of this Bill, land-holders wishing to clear vegetation will have to apply for a permit to do so through their local authority. Aside from the coalition's fundamental objection to freehold land-holders having to seek a permit for vegetation management on their property, the coalition has some fundamental concerns with the process proposed in this Bill. Under this Bill, rural land-holders have been singled out from normal development and will be denied the normal provisions granted to other land-holders. Importantly, where the whole purpose of the Integrated Planning Act was to streamline the assessment process and provide deadlines by which applicants would receive approval or otherwise to conduct that activity, those deadlines have been specifically denied to primary producers under this Bill. If the Minister for Primary Industries has the report, he should lay it on the table of the House right now rather than shred it.

Normally, for all other assessable activities the assessment manager must make the assessment within 20 days. If there is a concurrent agency involved, in this case the Department of Natural Resources, there is allowance for up to 60 days for the assessment to be made. But, under this Bill, vegetation management by primary producers has been specifically excluded from those limits. It has been left out. This is a gross denial of the rights afforded to all other developers. The so-called transition period, the first phase, which runs until 30 June 2000, and the second phase, which runs until 31 December 2000, will not have any time limits for the assessment of freehold primary producers' applications to clear. But during the first phase, clearing on all other land development will not even be regarded as an assessable activity. Clearing on this land will go on unchecked.

During the second phase, land clearing on all land other than farmland will be regarded as an assessable activity, but the ordinary time frames that are provided in the IPA will apply. This is gross discrimination against primary producers. This looks after the urban areas but hangs rural and regional Queensland out to dry. It is pitting country against city. It is giving huge assistance to city people at the expense of country people. I thought we were all one country, all one people. That is what we try to say we are. This puts a lie to the claims of the Premier and his Natural Resources Minister that there will be no moratorium on tree clearing on freehold land. This is a moratorium far worse than ever envisaged. This is far worse than the moratorium originally proposed by the Government to run until April.

This provision leaves the processing of tree-clearing applications in the hands of the most out-of-touch, anti-development and anti-jobs Minister for Natural Resources this Parliament has seen in a long while. This is the same Minister who has consistently treated rural people with contempt. This is the same Minister who claimed that primary producers breed dingoes to profit from a lousy \$10 bounty. We have seen his form. We know what he is like. This is the same Minister who directed his department to stop processing applications for assistance under the Water Development Incentive Scheme. This is the same Minister who is now trying to worm his way out of paying the subsidy under that scheme to land-holders who invested in water infrastructure developments in good faith on the basis of receiving State Government assistance. Under this provision, legitimate management of vegetation management in this State will cease for up to 12 months. This is a moratorium of grand proportions. The Premier and the Minister cannot stand in this place and claim otherwise without misleading the Parliament.

The Beattie Government claims it has consulted on this Bill. It has not. The Bill was drafted without any intention of adjusting it according to the needs and requests of primary producers. The ads which are already running on TV were made three weeks ago. Bookings for advertising space in the

newspapers were made a few days ago. At his so-called last ditched attempt to negotiate on Tuesday night, the Premier had made up his mind. The Bill was already drafted. The sole purpose of that meeting was for the Premier to try to bludgeon rural industry into submission and accept his Bill. That is what he was trying to do. It was the same trick used in the RFA—to put a gun at the heads of industry to try to force them to buckle.

To the credit of the leaders of Agforce, they have not buckled and continue to stand up for their members. Unlike some others, they have refused to succumb to the bullyboy tactics of the Premier and his henchmen. Their stance will hold them in good stead. Agforce is an organisation that puts and pushes the interests and the livelihoods of their members ahead of political wheeling and dealing with a venomous and malicious Beattie Government.

The coalition cannot and will not support this Bill, which paves the way for the destruction of rural Queensland. It is not a Bill of a Government for all Queenslanders; this is a Bill of a Government that is driven by PR stunts, quick fixes, grubby political deals and ideological, extremist policy. The Bill will be to the Beattie Government in the bush what Wayne Goss's decision was to close down one third of the State's railways. The Bill kills any chance the Government may have had with its publicity stunt to establish a Country Labor Party. Imagine that! A Country Labor Party! The Bill is anti-jobs, anti-regional development and anti-Queensland.

Time expired.
