



Speech by

DESLEY BOYLE

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

Hansard 1 March 2000

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT LEGISLATION

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (6.49 p.m.): I rise to support the Government's amendment to this Bill. I do so in some amazement at the illogical, semi-religious fervour of the previous speaker on the issue of the meaning of freehold title. I cannot think why he would speak with such religious fervour and without intelligence, other than for two possible reasons. One is perhaps because he believes his constituents—

Mr FELDMAN: I rise to a point of order. I take exception to the statement by the member, and I ask that it be withdrawn.

Ms BOYLE: Which statement, Mr Speaker?

Mr SPEAKER: You find the words offensive and you are asking that they be withdrawn; is that correct?

Mr Feldman: Yes, Mr Speaker.

Ms BOYLE: I withdraw. There could be two reasons for the illogical tirade from the other side of the House. Firstly, there could perhaps be a lack of intelligence and understanding. Secondly, the member could believe wrongly—as I predict the ballot box will show in about 15 months' time—that his constituents will approve the nonsense that he has put before the House tonight.

I own several blocks of freehold land and I am sure that other honourable members also are pleased to say that they, too, own their little pieces of Australia. On one of my blocks of land is my home, and I am not entitled to do on that block of land anything that I choose. There are various local government, State Government and Federal Government restrictions on what I can do on my residential block. I own another piece of land on which I conduct business and, again, there are restrictions even though that is freehold land. I must behave in the community's interests and within the laws, whichever level of Government may set those laws for orderly activity. That is all this Bill is about. That is all we are asking.

We agree with members opposite that the majority of farmers are responsible. They believe in sustainable farming and looking after the fragile ecosystems that may be formed on part of their land. But that is only the majority. As in any industry sector, there is a minority who will not be dictated to by Government, and yet they must be. That is when we need the full force of the law, particularly where we have ecosystems that are seriously at risk and vegetation types that are close to extinction. Even the Queensland Farmers Federation acknowledges the need to protect these endangered ecosystems. In total, in Queensland that represents 925,000 hectares, or 0.5% of the State. Of this, only 440,000 hectares is freehold. Therefore, surely it makes good sense not only to constituents in our electorates but also to all honourable members that these precious areas must be protected. If farmers will not do so voluntarily, we should provide them with the necessary information, and, in the end, a measure that compels them to do so.

We have spoken about consultation this evening, and I note that recently the Minister for Natural Resources was in north Queensland holding a vegetation management forum for land-holders at Atherton. In spite of what members opposite might have hoped, that meeting was calm, constructive and a valuable opportunity for producers to get accurate information. I agree with the member for Tablelands that we have a great number of fine farmers on the Atherton Tableland. They take excellent care of the land and have taken steps to remediate the mistakes of the past through replanting.

The environment groups also have a strong influence. As a result of the dialogue in recent months, I am pleased to note that there will be flexibility in the implementation of the Bill to take into account local and regional circumstances. Local communities, farmers, community members, environmental groups and industry players will all have a say in developing regional vegetation management plans for that purpose. That local knowledge and the interpretation and implementation of the Bill in a local way will make it far more effective. This commonsense Bill provides a balanced framework for sustainable land management. It will go a long way towards protecting our State's unique biodiversity.

Time expired.
