



Speech by

**GEOFF WILSON**

**MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE**

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Hansard 7 September 2000

### **VEGETATION MANAGEMENT AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr WILSON** (Ferry Grove—ALP) (10.08 p.m.): It is a pleasure to speak in support of the Vegetation Management Amendment Bill. Land degradation has been a longstanding issue throughout Australia for many decades, principally in relation to a range of land use practices that in more recent times we have come to understand have produced such a detrimental effect upon the land that vegetation management legislation such as we have before the House today is absolutely critical.

I recall growing up in the southern Riverina, just north of the Murray River. Year after year, for a number of years, we would be subjected to red dust that came from western New South Wales because of the land clearing practices that were then going on there. After a couple of days, we would have to go through the house and dust every item and wash all the linen, curtains and so on because of the fine red dust that was blown from the west as a result of the degradation of land in western New South Wales. That was principally because of the overclearing that was taking place, even that long ago. The problems of salination that we experience now and the difficulties with soil conservation and watercourse erosion are products of practices back then. This is a longstanding issue. Unless we deal with it effectively, future generations will bear the consequences.

There is an assumption sometimes expressed by some members on the other side of the House that people on this side of the House are not acquainted with the difficulties experienced by people on the land, as if we were all born and raised in a metropolitan environment. I for one, like many others on this side of the House, have a country background and am familiar with circumstances over many years in central west New South Wales and in the southern Riverina.

Both sides of my family come from the land—many, many generations. The whole culture I grew up in involved an understanding and appreciation of and sensitivity to the problems that farmers experience. My relatives were never fortunate enough to have big land-holdings. They battled with the small blocks they had, as did many other families.

There is a genuine sensitivity to and awareness of the difficulties experienced by our fellow Queenslanders in the rural and regional areas of our great State by members on this side of the House. It is with that sort of background that we try to come to grips with this issue of vegetation management. The Bill introduced in December was an excellent one. It is a great shame that, through the neglect of the Federal Government, its provisions are now not able to be fully implemented.

As members might expect, I have a more recent and immediate sensitivity to the importance of vegetation management legislation because of the special nature of parts of my electorate of Ferry Grove. In many ways I think I am blessed to have the areas of the Samford Valley and the southern part of the D'Aguilar Range in my electorate, particularly the communities of Mount Nebo and Mount Glorious. It is a well-kept secret within south-east Queensland that the areas of the D'Aguilar Range, Mount Glorious and Mount Nebo are so wonderful. The Brisbane Forest Park and that area of the range have been referred to as the lungs of Brisbane. The local communities depend greatly on maintaining the natural landscape and natural vegetation that is there at the moment. The importance of that natural vegetation to the growing interest in tourism in that area cannot be overstated.

I look forward to the cooperation between the State Government instrumentalities and the Pine Rivers Shire Council in implementing the letter and, more importantly, the spirit of the amended

vegetation management legislation to fully protect all types of tenure on the D'Aguilar Range and in the Samford Valley. The new councillor for Division 1 in the Pine Rivers Shire Council has shown a welcome readiness to work with all levels of government and the relevant elected representatives for the area, irrespective of party affiliation, for the benefit of everyone in the community. That is to be commended.

As I said, the original Bill introduced in December last year sought to provide a flexible and balanced framework for sustainable land management well into the future, addressing both leasehold and freehold title as well as endangered and of concern vegetation. It was developed following extensive consultation amongst all stakeholders, including our rural industries, conservation groups, urban development industry, local government and Government agencies. It was developed because, amongst other things, land clearing has long been recognised by the scientific community as a significant factor in land degradation, the loss of biodiversity and accelerated greenhouse gas emissions.

Let us keep in mind that discussions about a planning regime for tree clearing have been going on in Queensland for over a decade. It should also be remembered that vegetation management is not a peculiarly State issue; it crosses State and Federal boundaries, as one would expect. It is incumbent upon the Federal Government to provide every assistance and cooperation to this State Government in its delivery of sensible and balanced vegetation management legislation in this State.

The State Government made a commitment to farmers that protection of the of concern regional ecosystems—those ecosystems vulnerable to extinction—would be removed from the Vegetation Management Act if the Commonwealth did not provide funding support. This commitment was made after the State Government put forward \$111m over four years to support our new vegetation management guidelines. We sought \$103m over four years from the Federal Government—a small contribution when compared with the dollars paid out to other States to repair the damage caused by failing to act soon enough. Earlier I referred to the generations over which land degradation has occurred in other States.

The Federal Government has failed to deliver on the assurances given to Queensland during the preparation of these guidelines. We now know that representations by the National Party led to Federal Cabinet being deadlocked, doing nothing to support Queensland. The result is that the Federal Government has reneged on its stated intention of some time ago to do everything possible to assist the introduction of this legislation into Queensland.

Even an approach to the Commonwealth from key rural industry groups—Agforce, Canegrowers, Queensland Fruit and Vegetable Growers, Cotton Australia; they were all represented at various meetings—could not raise a cent for our farmers because the National Party here in Queensland scuttled the original guidelines for Queensland. Rural industry has sought an opportunity to have strong local input into this legislation.

With this amendment, the onus will be on local communities to create a level of vegetation protection beyond just endangered regional ecosystems to underpin their prosperity for years to come. Both endangered and "of concern" regional ecosystems will be protected on leasehold land. Some 73% of all State land is leasehold, but on freehold land only endangered regional ecosystems will be protected, with local groups having the ability to go beyond this level of protection. That is because with freehold land the Federal Government has backed away from any support it was otherwise going to give for a combined funding package to cover the compensation that would be rightly due to freehold owners of land if their use of that land were restricted by the imposition of guidelines designed to protect of concern as well as endangered ecosystems.

More than 20 regional vegetation management committees will be established in the next few months to develop plans for the future. The committees will use the legislative framework to develop a local approach to land management. These committees should consider the new guidelines as minimum standards for managing vegetation to sustain our land and protect biodiversity. There is no reason why these regional groups cannot go well beyond the level of protection prescribed in the guidelines, and the Government is encouraging them to do so.

I look forward to a continuation of the spirit of cooperation shown by the Mountain Environment Protection Association, covering Mount Nebo and Mount Glorious, other concerned members of the community in the Samford Valley and the Pine Rivers Shire Council and the relevant State Government agencies—working cooperatively together to achieve a net outcome through this new legislation that is of benefit to not only this generation of Queenslanders but also future generations, for whom we hold in trust the natural vegetation that we have throughout Queensland. Of particular concern to me is the D'Aguilar Range in the electorate of Ferny Grove. I commend the legislation to the House.

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