



Speech by

**SHAUN NELSON**

**MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS**

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Hansard 1 March 2000

### **VEGETATION MANAGEMENT LEGISLATION**

**Mr NELSON** (Tablelands—IND) (6.33 p.m.): I support the motion moved by the member for Barambah. I also support the words of the Deputy Premier tonight, as I have had members of the National Party come to my electorate and shout loudly and clearly about how much they hate the Vegetation Management Bill. Yet here we are actually talking about trying to rescind the Bill, and there is only a handful of National Party members in the Chamber. I acknowledge that the member for Callide is here. He is one of the few members of the National Party for whom I have any respect. However, the simple fact is that the member for Keppel is not in the Chamber. He has run around my electorate spouting off to the very, very few National Party people left in the electorate telling them how much he is going to do about the Bill. Where is he? He is not in the House. That is a simple statement. I will make sure that this speech that I am making tonight is circulated to the people in my electorate whom he basically misled to let them know exactly what is going on in this House.

The simple fact is that, no matter what any member on either side of the House thinks of it, this Bill has failed completely to achieve what it set out to achieve, which is to protect the environments that are in danger. From the start, it has been misguided, misrepresented and totally and utterly flogged to death in all arenas. In my electorate, all I did was to hand photocopies of the Bill to people and say, "Here, read this." One of those people took a copy of the Bill and addressed the Minister when he was in Atherton. I am told that the Minister was asked quite a few very detailed questions that he could not answer. I have it on good authority that in one of his statements—and I have this on good authority; I do not have to be at a meeting on the tablelands to know what is being said there—the Minister said that, given his time again, he would do things differently; he would not have done this. When one of the farmers put it to him—and let us face it: people on the tablelands say what they feel—"All right then, pull the Bill and let's start from scratch and we will help you write a good one", he said, "No, we can't do that." The simple reason why the Minister cannot do that is that that would be an admission of defeat. It would be a political slap in the face for the Minister.

If the Minister were honest and if he were a man who wanted to do the right thing by the environment, on behalf of the environment he would admit defeat and say, "All right, we will start again from scratch." I assure the Minister that the farmers and other people in my electorate who have properties that are affected by this legislation would work with him. At the meeting, they said that they would work with the Minister to try to get something done the right way.

I could talk about so many points that are contained in this Bill. I do not know if the Minister has actually been to Lake Eacham, and he is not in the Chamber to say whether he has, which is in my electorate. It is a beautiful little crater lake, completely surrounded by rainforest, in a magnificent part of the world. That rainforest is regrowth. I have photos of Lake Eacham surrounded by houses with not a single tree around it. So we are talking about what is now World Heritage rainforest, or completely protected rainforest, that is regrowth. Under the terms of the Bill, because it is regrowth, that rainforest could be bulldozed.

The simple fact is that no thought and planning went into this Bill. It was written by what I call environmental vandals—the people who want to save and lock up everything instead of actually looking at how to manage it properly—who have not gone through all the points that can be debated in relation to the whole concept. The point that has really been hammered home to me in my electorate by

people who are in the know—and a lot of the tablelands properties are freehold—is that the basic fundamental of this Bill attacks freehold property rights. That is a right that people pay for. Very, very few property owners would actually go about destroying the vegetation on their property just for the sake of it. Like conservatives bashing unions, all that is farmer bashing by the members opposite. They know that that will not cost them one vote. It is trendy voodoo magic to play with the people in Brisbane, because the people in Brisbane do not have trees in their backyards; they have concrete. So the members opposite can say, "All of these trees are being bulldozed by farmers. We will put in this Bill and stop the farmers from bulldozing the trees." Farmers do not bulldoze trees. Very, very few clear-felling operations have been in progress on the tablelands for at least 30 or 40 years.

The simple fact is that, on the tablelands—and this is a point that is not being addressed in this Bill, either—we are actually reclaiming rainforest by replanting. Because of large-scale regrowth, parts of the tablelands have rainforest in them that never had rainforest before. Recently, a person from Brisbane came to the tablelands and could not believe the amount of regrowth. This is an issue that has been played up by some environmental vandals in the department who have tried to get their own way, failed miserably and instead angered the people of Queensland—and rightfully so.

I say to the Minister: rescind the Bill, do the right thing, start from scratch, and the people will work with you. This is not the way to govern the State. Government members have seen that this legislation will not work. They have seen the anger and the backlash that it has caused. Let us try to do something right and rescind the Bill.

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