



Speech by

SHAUN NELSON

MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS

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VEGETATION MANAGEMENT AMENDMENT BILL

Mr NELSON (Tablelands—IND) (9.56 p.m.): I will take only a couple of minutes. What I am going to say is going to be pretty surprising for some people in the Chamber. There has been a lot of hysteria about this Bill and, as far as I am concerned, a lot of misinformation has been spread around. We do need to manage our environment for a lot of reasons, and a lot of people on both sides of this Chamber agree with that. Most farmers whom I know and with whom I spend a lot of time are good environmental managers, but there are some who are out and out environmental vandals. However, it is not just farmers who are environmental vandals; some developers, especially around the fringes of Brisbane, do a hell of a lot more damage than any farmer could ever do, especially when they clear fell land and plough it up to build houses.

Getting to the point of the matter, there has been a lot of hysteria about this Bill. In reading this Bill and in going over the topic in detail, I have not found in this Bill some of the things that I thought I would. I do not find it to be anywhere near as restrictive as it was first made out to be. I must admit that at the very start I was caught up in a bit of the hysteria as well.

Mr Lucas: You!

Mr NELSON: Yes, me, believe it or not.

I thought that there was a lot more in this Bill than there actually is. Having spent the time to go through it reasonably and rationally and actually reading some of the information that has been included, especially now, I know that it is not a major threat to the people of the Atherton Tableland, it is not a threat to good farming practices and it is not a threat to the areas that are farmed on the tablelands already. The land clearing that was needed to be done on the tablelands was carried out 50 or 100 years ago.

Mr Littleproud: That's right. It's not a threat to your area.

Mr NELSON: Exactly. I thank the member for Western Downs, because he is exactly right. It is not a threat to the area from which I come. As I said, I am not an expert on the areas of Western Downs or Callide. The people to whom honourable members should talk about those areas are the people who live there.

Call me naive, but I have the utmost faith that the department and its officers will go about their duties as best they can to make sure that this Bill is implemented in the right way, because our environment is important. We live in a country that is fragile; we live in an ecosystem that is incredibly fragile and we live in an age when that ecosystem is increasingly under threat. I live in a World Heritage listed area. I live in a part of Australia that is scenically magnificent. I am not a greenie by any stretch of the imagination, but I do believe that we live in such an age that, if we do not start thinking about the future of the place we live in and if we do not start managing that future, we are going to have a very bleak and grim outlook in following years. Once something is destroyed and gone, we cannot get it back. I would probably go even further in some respects and say that there are other ways of looking at arranging management for those areas. But I am not the Minister; I do not have the ability to do that.

I believe that a lot of misinformation has been spread about this Bill. I have gone through the issues with the people in my electorate in detail and I have raised their concerns. However, one incredibly interesting issue, and it has been raised with me on numerous occasions, is what the Federal

Government will do if this legislation is not passed. Sometimes it is better the devil you know. I think Senator Robert Hill would quite happily whip Queensland to make up a few votes in South Australia. He might say, "I'm managing vegetation. I'm limiting what they can do in Queensland." However, it needs to be remembered that South Australia does not have the same level of vegetation as Queensland has. It does not have zones that Queensland has such as the Wet Tropics or the open savanna country. Therefore, I am more afraid of Senator Robert Hill than I am of the Minister, the member for Everton. I fear Senator Hill 10 times more, because from time to time Senator Robert Hill has shown himself to be totally against agricultural practices in Queensland and totally unhelpful when it comes to these debates.

A Government member: And anti-Queensland.

Mr NELSON: Yes, very anti-Queensland. I want to place that on the record. I ask my constituents to think about this: what would the Federal Government do if these laws were not put in place? What pressure would be placed on us by Senator Robert Hill and his gang of cutthroats? We have been taught not to trust the Federal Government. I would trust a Queensland Government before I would trust a Federal Government.

In relation to the compensation issue, I believe that we need to look at some level of compensation. Whenever we adjust the way people use something in their possession, we must duly compensate them. If the Government compulsorily acquires land in order to build a road through somebody's land, the owner of that land should be compensated. If the Government rightfully takes away their right to clear land, that is fair enough. I have no problem with that. However, they should be compensated for the worth of that land, especially if it is freehold title. That is my opinion and the opinion of my constituents. The compensation issue is the biggest problem I have with this Bill.

I also have a very big problem with the fact that the debate has been guillotined. Members do not get the full amount of time to debate the Bill. However, that is a democratic problem. Because other members in this place want to contribute to the debate on the second reading, I will leave it at that. If the amendments moved by the member for Keppel in the Committee stage are accepted, I am more than happy to support the Bill.
