



Speech by

Mrs D. PRATT

MEMBER FOR BARAMBAH

Hansard 1 May 2001

AFRICAN LOVEGRASS; VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

Mrs PRATT (Nanango—Ind) (12.05 p.m.): African lovegrass is already one of the main weeds of the Burnett region and it is rapidly getting worse. Recent meetings at Kingaroy and Eidsvold revealed the extent of public concern for African lovegrass. Ninety people representing local government, government departments, Landcare and farmers travelled from Crows Nest and Jandowae to Kingaroy to express their concerns regarding this problem plant. Seventy people at Eidsvold expressed similar concerns.

The very rapid spread of African lovegrass along roadsides and its extremely invasive nature is leading to significant areas of pastures being taken over. As well, this aggressive grass is invading many of the remnant vegetation areas and is reducing biodiversity by taking out native species. Urban communities are also having problems with African lovegrass. It is taking over playing fields, parks, footpaths and industrial and waste areas.

The farmers attending the seminar in Kingaroy told of ways that they had tried to control the grass, from burning, ploughing and using goats and donkeys to chemicals. The most successful method seemed to be the use of a couple of different herbicides. However, most were disappointed at the lack of action by the local councils to do anything about the spread of the grass along the roadsides and felt that slashing was contributing to the grass' spread. This is not just a problem in the Burnett. Areas of the grass are established in a number of places throughout Australia, including Gippsland in eastern Victoria.

Governments, both state and federal, should be looking at ways to attack the problem by way of research through CSIRO, DPI or Landcare and financial assistance and advice to local councils. There are no easy control methods for this plant. Prevention of spread and seeding of the plant seems to be by far the best policy. Farmers can prevent its spread by cleaning down the slashers, machinery and vehicles after operating in areas with African lovegrass. Movement of animals is also likely to spread the plant's seeds through their carriage in mud on feet and wet coats.

To date the only herbicide registered for the control of African lovegrass in pastures in Queensland is glyphosate-ipa based. There are other chemical registrations for control of the plant on various crops and other situations.

Because of the current low rate of spread it is considered feasible to implement a program to suppress and then eradicate African lovegrass. In Victoria it has been suggested that an integrated set of control methods will need to be employed. Only each stakeholder playing its part can remove this lovegrass problem and achieve the overall goal of suppression and eradication. It is essential that research be undertaken under Queensland conditions to understand the biology of the plant, to study the different ecosystems and to develop management and chemical control strategies.

I move to a second issue. The sustainable management of Queensland's native vegetation is vital for protecting our unique biodiversity and ensuring the long-term productivity and profitability of our rural industries. Queensland's proclaimed Vegetation Management Act 1999 is said to be an investment in our future. It is supposed to provide a clear guide to ensure our land is sustained for generations to come. Nevertheless, several constituents have written to my office and visited me to outline the impact that the Vegetation Management Act has had on their future, and their future is not looking bright.

The impact of the Vegetation Management Act will mean that these property owners will lose a substantial amount of money, with the result that their companies will no longer be viable and will have to be wound up. The problem is that their plan to be self-funded retirees was based on the sale of the trees and/or land to provide for their superannuation. This is now impossible, as the land that is unable to be cleared for agricultural purposes is also unlikely to sell. These property owners are also left with council rates of many thousands of dollars each year on land that is controlled by the state. The Vegetation Management Act has had a disastrous effect on these people, resulting not only in the decreased productivity of their land but also in the literal theft of their retirement funds.

If the government is so concerned and committed to maintaining forests for the future, would it consider the purchase of this land for native forest for the state's future, because it has no worth whatsoever as agricultural land and has become a financial burden to the land-holders. I ask that the government consider these measures.

Time expired.
