



Speech by

JOHN KINGSTON

MEMBER FOR MARYBOROUGH

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VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

Dr KINGSTON (Maryborough—Ind) (6.34 p.m.): I rise to support the original motion. I do so because inherent in the RFA and the vegetation legislation introduced by this government and passed by the parliament is the unstated assumption that farmers and graziers are not responsible custodians of their land, land which they hold in trust for later generations. Further, this government assumes that the judgments concerning what is responsible land use have to be made by bureaucrats—bureaucrats who infrequently leave their offices. The current bureaucracy in Queensland is short of experienced, practical, resource-use practitioners.

Henry Nix, now Professor of Environmental Studies at the Australian National University, started his life as part of a grazing family. Then he became a soil scientist, mapping and planning a significant section of the brigalow scheme. He has never stopped reviewing the progress of land development in Australia. He is a member of the world Chernobyl committee, the world ozone layer committee and so on. Thus, he is respected world wide by genuine conservationists. A major study by Henry Nix in the last few years has identified that the majority—80 per cent—of land degradation caused by farming and grazing occurred in the first 30 years of settlement. That degradation occurred because our forefathers farmed in the manner to which they were accustomed in Europe. Undoubtedly they made some mistakes which we have to rectify.

This legislation impacts on our current farmers and graziers. Essentially it denies that our farmers have learned anything about conservation and land care since settlement. I personally find that insulting, as do all responsible land users. When a government makes such an assumption about its constituents then that government should not be surprised when its legislation is not well received or implemented. As Bill Burrows, a deservedly respected woodlands scientist, says, politicians come and go but good science remains forever. Bill has developed management tools that define rapidly and accurately how many trees should be retained on any site in Queensland to maximise grazing productivity and sustainability of herbage and tree cover.

Throughout south-east Queensland there are grazing families who have concurrently nurtured and sold trees and cattle. They are often equally reliant on both sawlogs and beef for their income. Over the years—often over three generations—their production of both end products has improved substantially and they have halted and even reversed any degradation that had occurred before they assumed custodianship. Often their land borders land owned by the Queensland forestry department. Only a fence separates them from Forestry owned land, but they sustainably outproduce Forestry by a factor of three to four times. I am not saying that older Queensland Forestry field officers do not appreciate the positive impacts of silviculture, but they have had their maintenance budgets so savagely cut that they are embarrassed by the state of many native forest estates.

Whilst I am talking about the Queensland forestry department, I have to mention the fact that private land-holders have to maintain their land free from noxious weeds but the forestry department does not. Groundsel, lantana and rat-tail grass flourish in many exotic pine plantations and infest adjoining privately owned land. Thus, land controlled by this presumptuous government is allowed to exist in a degraded state for which private land-holders are fined. I have repeatedly invited members of the government to visit some of these silvicultured properties with me, but never—not ever—has any government member had the coverage or the genuine interest to come. Today I repeat that invitation to the new members of the government. Surely amongst 66 there will be somebody who is interested.

I am a member of the regional vegetation committee which extends from Cooloola to Miriam Vale, which will meet for the first time within the next couple of weeks. By the number of phone calls I am receiving, particularly from the Miriam Vale district, the land-holders in that area are anything but happy and anything but relaxed about this legislation.
