



Speech by

Hon. S. ROBERTSON

MEMBER FOR STRETTON

Hansard 7 August 2001

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Leasehold Land

Hon. S. ROBERTSON (Stretton—ALP) (Minister for Natural Resources and Minister for Mines) (10.08 a.m.), by leave: I recently announced government plans to interpret the Land Act more broadly to allow some rural leaseholders to diversify into additional land use activities to improve their economic viability and sustainability. Rural leasehold land constitutes more than 70 per cent of the land area of Queensland. So naturally the quality of the use and management of the leasehold estate has a major bearing on Queensland's long-term economic prosperity and natural resource sustainability. This week I am writing to leaseholders to inform them about the new opportunities under this plan and to advise them that draft guidelines will be available for public comment from 20 August.

The new approach will apply to leaseholders of pastoral leases and grazing homestead perpetual leases and allow them to diversify into complementary land use activities that can be conducted under existing legislation without impacting on native title. Activities may include some forms of aquaculture, timber plantations, small-scale feedlots, low-key tourism such as homestay enterprises, nature conservation, documentary and film-making, and crops traditionally not associated with these types of properties. However, the scale of diversification will be an important consideration. It will not be possible to approve new land uses which become the dominant enterprise on the property.

I am pleased to report that the government's plan has been hailed by land-holders, rural industry groups and local authorities alike as a very progressive and practical way to address the problem of declining rural economic viability. Even the National Party's recent defector, the federal member for Kennedy, Bob Katter, recognised the importance of this government initiative when he said recently in the media, 'You would have to go back to the days of the Bjelke-Petersen government to find a result as good as this for land-holders.'

My Department of Natural Resources and Mines has begun consulting with other relevant state government departments, rural industry bodies and conservation and indigenous interest groups to develop final guidelines to determine the appropriate scales of each use. I have decided on this new approach to land diversification because I am acutely aware of the economic difficulties being faced by rural land-holders. In a general climate of declining rural profitability, farmers have genuine concerns about the long-term viability of their farms and their ability to respond to changing local and international markets. This will allow Queensland land-holders to spread their economic risk into complementary activities, thus making them less reliant on traditional commodities and less vulnerable to commodity price crashes.
