



Speech by

**Hon. S. ROBERTSON**

**MEMBER FOR STRETTON**

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Hansard 7 November 2001

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

**Mulga Lands Bioregion**

**Hon. S. ROBERTSON** (Stretton—ALP) (Minister for Natural Resources and Minister for Mines) (10.14 a.m.), by leave: The Mulga Lands Bioregion in south-western Queensland covers more than 18 million hectares and is of significant environmental and agricultural importance. We need to ensure that the area is responsibly managed to protect biodiversity, avoid land degradation, and maintain and enhance rural productivity.

Much of the grazing industry in the bioregion depends on the use of mulga and other woody species for livestock grazing, particularly in times of drought. It is a resource that needs to be carefully managed and protected. Felling and pushing mulga and other native tree species requires approval under vegetation management legislation on both leasehold and freehold land. Last month I instructed my department to speed up the approval process for permits to clear mulga for fodder harvesting purposes in response to worsening drought conditions. Additional resources have also been allocated to accelerate processing of these permits to ensure that land-holders can harvest fodder in time to save their stock.

As a result of this issue and the general importance placed on fodder harvesting in the mulga lands, I have now moved to establish a forum to deal with urgent fodder issues in the region on a long-term basis. The round table forum will bring together land-holders, scientists and departmental representatives to come up with workable solutions to these issues under the Vegetation Management Act. Graziers will still be able to fodder harvest in line with existing policies until I am able to review the recommendations of the round table. I will be releasing details of the forum shortly.

In another important development, I am pleased to announce the release of a discussion paper on the development of a Regional Vegetation Management Plan for the mulga lands bioregion. The paper has been developed in close consultation with major stakeholder groups in the region. It will allow community groups and individuals to contribute directly to sustainable vegetation management activities in the mulga lands now and into the future.

Issues open for discussion until 15 February 2002 include: developing regionally relevant assessment codes for clearing approvals to suit local issues and priorities; identifying best practice management of all vegetation; identifying potential on-the-ground vegetation management strategies and actions that balance social, environmental and economic needs; identifying incentives that encourage best practice; and identifying areas of high nature conservation value and areas vulnerable to land degradation.

A series of public meetings to discuss the paper has been organised between 13 and 21 November. I would urge all Queenslanders living in the mulga lands to have their say on this crucial issue affecting the future prosperity of the bioregion.

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