



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

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NATURAL RESOURCES AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Ms MALE (Glass House—ALP) (4.00 p.m.): It is with great pleasure that I rise in support of the Natural Resources and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. This is a vitally important piece of legislation for a number of reasons. Mainly, it is important because it tackles illegal tree clearing by imposing tough measures on those people caught clearing land without a permit.

The bill is also important because it is the first real test for new National Party Leader, Lawrence Springborg, and his born-again opposition. The member for Southern Downs said when he won the opposition leadership that one of his priorities was land clearing. Naturally, the Beattie government would therefore welcome the opposition leader's fulsome and wholehearted support for this bill.

The new opposition leader has been to visit all the old National Party hacks to get advice, including his mentor Rob Borbidge, which is surprising as Rob Borbidge has never won a state election. Hopefully, as shadow minister for the environment, the member for Southern Downs will not employ the same cynical strategies Borbidge employed when in opposition. I remember the empty promises that the Borbidge opposition made to the Greens to get their support before the 1996 Mundingburra by-election. It came as no surprise to me that after their by-election win the Borbidge government neatly ignored all of their promises to the Greens, and the Environment portfolio languished for two and half years.

The Greens and the other conservation groups have not forgotten this deception, I have not forgotten this deception and neither should this parliament. However, today the member for Southern Downs can show his alleged true green colours by embracing this legislation. He should put aside his talking tough on law and order and start talking tough on flora and fauna protection. His 100 per cent support for this bill would be a step in the right direction and show that the National Party is more than a single issue, single constituency party.

I know that in my own electorate of Glass House people feel strongly about issues of conservation and land management. Farmers have embraced the need for sustainable farming practices in Glass House and they know that indiscriminate land clearing does more harm to their resources than any short-term benefits it might bring. In fact, a lot of land-holders are working closely with DNR and various landcare groups to ensure that they use the most sustainable practices and have also embarked on numerous revegetation projects to ensure this end. It is encouraging to see the number of 'land for wildlife' signs that have been going up around my electorate, as they also work in closely with the council and the vegetation officers there.

These land-holders have nothing to fear from this legislation because it is purely aimed at those people who clear land without permission. It is imperative that we control land clearing. We all know that excessive land clearing, especially in sensitive areas, can lead to major problems such as salinity, loss of water quality and a loss of biodiversity. This has huge implications for a sustainable agricultural industry as well as for the viability of the landscape itself.

Currently the vegetation management framework consists of the Vegetation Management Act, which controls clearing of native vegetation on freehold land and works in hand with the Integrated Planning Act 1997, the Land Act 1994, which controls clearing of native vegetation on leasehold land, the state policy for vegetation management on freehold land, the broadscale tree clearing policy for state lands and the new regional vegetation management plans which are well and truly being developed. These RVMPs are being prepared by 27 community based planning groups throughout the

state, and they have allowed land-holders, community and industry groups the chance to contribute their expertise to the preparation of these plans.

If land-holders wish to clear land, they need to ensure that they apply to the Department of Natural Resources and Mines, which will assess their applications against the code to ensure that it is suitable for the area and the environment. But this legislation today is designed to capture those people who do not follow the rules set down for sustainable management of the land. It is designed to heavily penalise those who would break the law and endanger the viability of our natural environment.

It was disappointing to hear the member for Callide and the member for Gregory twist the facts and put a rather confused spin on why we should not be putting this tough legislation into place. Innocent people are not going to be caught up in these penalties, only land-holders who are guilty of illegal clearing and guilty of environmental vandalism.

If everyone in Queensland was an environmentalist and a conservationist, as the member for Gregory stated, then we would not need to have this framework and this new lot of penalties in place. Of course we are not demonising all land-holders. We have made it quite clear that this legislation is needed to punish those land-holders who illegally clear vegetation and make sure that they do not receive an economic reward for that illegal clearing.

Let us look at what these penalties are. There are certainly heavy financial penalties. There is a possibility of compulsory remediation at land-holders' cost. This is an important step forward because illegal clearers in the past have been quite happy to cop a fine and then simply proceed with their plans for the cleared land. There could be forfeiture of their lease or a five-year ban on clearing permits for anyone with illegal clearing convictions. There is also the ability for the court to take into account additional factors when determining the severity of the offence, such as the amount of land cleared, whether the vegetation was considered to be endangered or threatened or not-of-concern vegetation and the sensitivity of the ecosystem. There is also the ability to link the land title to remediation orders so that the land-holder cannot benefit financially from illegal clearing. The bill also ensures that illegally cleared land cannot be re-cleared without obtaining a permit.

The penalties outlined in this bill should be a sufficient deterrent to stop people from illegally clearing land. Once these laws are enacted, I would urge the minister's departmental officers to step up inspections, and if any breaches are detected then penalties should be rigidly enforced. Hopefully through this bill and continuing discussions with the federal government, the Howard regime will finally come on board to reduce land clearing in Queensland and provide the necessary monetary incentives for people to reduce the need for continued land clearing. I call on Lawrence and Bob to lobby their federal counterparts in Canberra to put in place a compensation fund for land-holders.

Illegal land clearing is totally unacceptable, and I have heard many members during this debate mention this point. This legislation will hit offenders where it hurts most by ensuring that they cannot benefit economically from illegal clearing activities. They will not only be heavily fined but also be unable to utilise the land that they have illegally cleared. The present rate of land clearing is not sustainable, and we should all learn from the errors of the past. This bill will go a very long way to reducing illegal land clearing, and I commend the bill to the House.