



Speech by

JAN JARRATT

MEMBER FOR WHITSUNDAY

Hansard 13 March 2003

NATURAL RESOURCES AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Ms JARRATT (Whitsunday—ALP) (11.57 a.m.): Today I am pleased to rise in the House in support of the Natural Resources and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2003. This bill seeks to amend five pieces of legislation in order to deal with issues related to illegal tree clearing and the processes surrounding reconciling native title and mining and exploration activity. Today I will restrict my comments to those parts of the bill that deal with vegetation management.

Nobody could pretend that the issues surrounding land clearing in this state are free of an emotional dimension. Our history is inextricably tied to the notion that native vegetation is an impediment to progress. Once cleared, land can begin to be of value through cropping and grazing activity. In the golden age of agricultural expansion vegetation cover disappeared at an alarming rate, with the absolute blessing—indeed the very support—of government. The real consequences of broadacre clearing are only now becoming painfully obvious, as topsoil disappears on the wind and with the rain, salinity destroys huge tracts of our once fertile land and an increasing number of birds and animals join the endangered list due to the disappearance of their native habitat.

All but the most shortsighted now recognise the absolute imperative of holding on to what is left of our native vegetation. Accordingly, the Beattie government has previously introduced a legislative framework in relation to vegetation management that seeks to balance sustainable economic land use with the need to protect the environment and maintain biodiversity.

Unfortunately, as revealed by the latest Statewide Land and Trees Study, it is now clear that not everyone in this state shares this government's commitment to a sustainable future. We now know that some 61,000 hectares of native vegetation has been potentially illegally cleared. That is, native vegetation in an area approximately the same size as the electorates of Mudgeeraba or Moggill have disappeared from existence through the activity of unlawful clearing. Obviously, appealing to people to do the right thing because it is the law is simply not enough. That is why I am speaking in support of this bill, which seeks to give increased powers to investigate and prosecute tree clearing offences as well as to provide more deterrence to illegal clearing, including compulsory remediation and the possibility of a repeat offender's lease being revoked.

Sadly, the only way to send the message to some people that we will not tolerate the illegal clearing of our native vegetation is through the hip pocket nerve. That is just the target of this amendment bill. For example, should a leaseholder be found guilty of illegal tree clearing on more than one occasion, he or she may face the forfeiture of their lease. In addition, anyone found guilty of illegal clearing may be banned from applying for another in permit for five years.

An opposition member interjected.

Ms JARRATT: My father respects his environment and respects the fact that he needs to be a conservationist if he is going to survive in the long term. He would support this legislation, because he is not an environmental vandal.

I am very pleased to note that this bill also increases the likelihood that cleared land upon which a remediation order has been placed is far more likely to actually be revegetated. This is because the remediation order will now appear on the land title and it will be transferable with the sale of the land. This is a significant amendment, as in the past the threat of a fine offered no real deterrent. A landholder could more than account for the amount of that fine in the sale of a now cleared block of land. I welcome these and other measures that will ensure that people who have blatantly flouted the law by

engaging in illegal clearing of vegetation can now look forward to paying an appropriate penalty for their actions.

The other side of the vegetation management coin that provides a balance to this legislation is the development of a series of draft regional management plans. I intend to take just a few minutes to mention these documents because they will, I believe, be crucial in the development of a sense of ownership and understanding of the absolute necessity for everyone to cooperate in the sustainable management of the natural environment. The development of these documents has involved the pooling of scientific information with local knowledge and expertise to produce a management plan that is truly responsive to the local environment as well as providing a blueprint for action that is balanced, achievable and supported by local communities. The process used in the development of the plans has allowed local issues to be analysed and effective management strategies to be developed thereby providing a locally relevant solution for land managers.

I know that many hours of work has gone into the creation of the draft vegetation management plans and I was pleased to be present with the minister in Proserpine earlier this year when several of these plans, including the central Queensland coast plan that covers my electorate, were handed to the minister for his consideration. I certainly look forward to viewing the final documents, as I know that they will become an invaluable tool in providing guidance for vegetation management activities at the local level. It is not always easy to find the right balance between competing interests, but when the sustainability of our environment is at stake, we are right to err on the side of caution. That is why I support the content of this amendment bill and I commend it to the House.