



Speech by

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LAND CLEARING

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (12.16 p.m.): This afternoon I want to deal with some of the myths about land clearing in Queensland. Some of the myths and misinformation about this subject have already been well debated in this parliament. I want to refer to the Statewide Landcover and Trees Study, which is the government's own figures. This is a report produced by the Department of Natural Resources and some of the figures contained in it destroy some of the myths that the government likes to promote about land clearing. This report is certainly written from the government's perspective in that it tries to sensationalise the issue and tries to give the impression that somehow land clearing in Queensland is rampant and out of control. I want to look at some figures in this report that are not often quoted to destroy some of the myths.

The figure that is most often quoted by the Premier and the minister in front of the television cameras is the 378,000 hectare figure for total land clearing in Queensland. That sounds like a heck of a lot to anybody who does not understand the size and the scale of Queensland. This document also—and one has to look fairly hard to find it—gives a figure that puts that in some perspective, and that is the figure for the total woody vegetation cover for Queensland. What is the total area of woody vegetation cover for Queensland? In this document it is listed at 81 million hectares. Some 81 million hectares of Queensland is covered with woody vegetation of which that 378,000 hectares was cleared last year. That means that 0.46 per cent of the woody vegetation in Queensland was cleared last year.

At that rate, to put it in some perspective, it would take 217 years to clear the rest of the woody vegetation in Queensland. Of course no-one wants that to happen and of course I am not suggesting that that should happen. But that puts it in some perspective in terms of the size and the scale of Queensland. It is also interesting to note in this report that that 81 million hectares identified has actually increased from the 76 million hectares identified a few years ago—that is, there has actually been a five million hectare increase in the woody vegetation identified by the SLATS report.

The report indicates that that is due in some measure to improvement in technology. To some extent, I accept that. But I suggest it is also due to forest thickening and the encroachment that all of us involved in natural resource management know is taking place. Let us look at that figure of 378,000 hectares in more detail. Page 8 of the report sets out how that figure was arrived at. The report states—

We have mapped vegetation change for all perennial woody plants of all sizes that can be distinguished with Landsat imagery. The statistics for vegetation change in woody vegetation cover quoted in this report include all woody vegetation. This includes remaining areas of native vegetation, disturbed areas of native vegetation and—

here is the important bit—

regrowth, plantations of native and exotic species and domestic woody vegetation.

That 378,000 hectares includes clearing of lantana and rubber vine and even the harvesting of native pine plantations, yet nobody says that when they wave around a figure of 378,000 hectares as though it is a great cause of concern to everybody in Queensland. The figure that is more accurate can be found in figure 2 on page 19, namely, a figure of 225,000 hectares, because that relates to remnant vegetation. But no-one ever cites that. The figure that is most important in any consideration of land clearing in Queensland is that figure—225,000 hectares of remnant vegetation. But what percentage does that represent of the remaining remnant vegetation in Queensland? Unfortunately, the report does not tell us that. For the past two weeks, members of my staff have been trying to find out what percentage that represents. The minister's own department cannot tell us that. There has been no

effort to try to understand what proportion of Queensland's remnant native forest has actually been cleared.

This government is more interested in sensationalism, media hype, headlines and opportunities that vegetation management and tree clearing present than in any sort of legitimate consideration of the issue. We all support a regulated tree clearing regime that protects Queensland's environment. The current Labor government has not been able to manage that.

Time expired.