



Speech by

JEFF SEENEY

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

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VEGETATION (APPLICATION FOR CLEARING) BILL

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (10.31 a.m.): We are back in the House today to once again kick Peter Beattie's favourite political football. This is an issue that has been a political football for this government for the last three and a half years. They have turned this issue into a political football like no other issue before it. This issue of vegetation management in Queensland has become Peter Beattie's favourite political football, and it is trotted back into the House as a diversion. Once again we are here creating a diversion from the real issue that the government wants to hide from. We are here today simply because the Beattie government is broke. We are here today because the financial black hole that this government is falling into is becoming more and more apparent to everybody who observes politics in Queensland. Therefore, the favourite political football gets pulled out again.

This issue of vegetation management has been a political football since the first legislation was introduced into the House by the now Attorney-General back in December 1999. It was just before Christmas, I think it was, when it went through this House. The passage of that first legislation followed a cheap political stunt campaign that set out to demonise Queensland land-holders, sensationalise the issue, hype the issue up, and try and turn it into a political issue. It ignores the realities and it ignores the impacts that those political games would have on people that were going to be affected by the legislation. That was the approach that was taken by the now Attorney-General when he was Minister for Natural Resources and Mines. That approach has been continued through successive pieces of legislation that the Beattie Labor government has brought into this House to address vegetation management.

This one is no exception. The legislation before the House today is simply a political stunt. It once again sets out to continue that line of sensationalising the issue of vegetation management in Queensland. It sets out to continue that approach of hyping the issue up. It sets out to turn it into a political issue rather than to address the realities of the situation, rather than to move towards the conclusion that we all want to see, and that is a reasonable and a logical resolution to the vegetation management issue in Queensland.

On this side of the House we want to see a vegetation management regime in Queensland that has integrity, that has involvement of stakeholders, and that has the support and the confidence of the people who will be impacted by that vegetation management regime. That is what we want to see on this side of the House, and that is what we have been working towards in the four years that the Labor government has turned this into a political football. It is not just the members on this side of the House who have been working towards that. A large number of stakeholders—a large number of property owners—have been involved in a regional vegetation management planning process, which has been moving towards the conclusion of a successful vegetation management regime which people can have confidence in.

However, the legislation before the House today completely destroys that process. It completely destroys any confidence that had been built up amongst people involved in vegetation management planning that that conclusion could be achieved. In that, it is a political tragedy. It is a tragedy that once again we see this issue used as a political football with a political stunt-type piece of legislation that

regrettably will ensure that the progress towards the goal of achieving sustainable vegetation management in Queensland is halted and reversed. That is a shame.

This piece of legislation is like the last two pieces of legislation that deal with this issue that we have debated in this House. It will do more harm than good because of the fact that the issue is used as a political football and the government is after political sensationalism, political headlines, and is not prepared to address the reality of the situation.

Let us look at what the legislation does. It puts in place a moratorium, to use the minister's words. It is a very short piece of legislation that would have it that any application that is made under the Integrated Planning Act for the clearing of vegetation within the period that is going to be defined in the regulation is taken to be not properly made. It comes in response to a deliberate strategy by the government to once again create a panic situation; to somehow create the perception that there is a panic situation going on and that there is a terrible situation occurring that has to be stopped and stopped quickly.

This is a continuation of the approach that was taken by the former Minister for Natural Resources when the legislation was first introduced. The impression was created that somehow Queensland was being cleared from the Northern Territory border to the coast and from the peninsula to the Gold Coast; that Queensland was down to its last scrap of remnant vegetation. It also created the impression that unless the government acted quickly and decisively, and unless they were big and bold and brave and confronted this issue and big-noted themselves and made heroes of themselves, then somehow the Queensland environment was going to be destroyed.

That is what the current Minister for Natural Resources and Mines has attempted to do in the last couple of months or the last few weeks. He has tried to suggest that once again we have a panic situation that has to be addressed by him as some sort of a white knight who is going to protect the environment from the ravages of all those terrible 'cowboys', I think the word was, that the Premier and his minister like to use.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Nothing could be more false. Nothing could be more untrue. In another place it would be called telling lies. In this place it is certainly misinformation. It is certainly an irresponsible use of the available information that that type of perception is created for purely political purposes—to try to once again hype up the issue, sensationalise it and turn it into a political issue that will divert attention away from the billion-dollar deficit that the current Labor government is facing.

The first thing I will do in this contribution is look at some of the myths upon which this legislation is based—some of those things that are used or misused to justify bringing this legislation into the House. All of the available data on tree clearing in Queensland is supposedly encapsulated in the Statewide Landcover and Trees Study, produced by the Department of Natural Resources and commonly referred to as the SLATS report. The SLATS report measures landcover changes from satellite photography.

The minister has challenged my use of a number of figures and I would like to refer him to those today. At the same time, I will put to rest some of the myths that are perpetuated about vegetation management in Queensland and the extent of the problem, or otherwise, that is being faced and that needs to be addressed.

The first figure that I believe is relevant puts to rest the notion that we have a panic situation that needs to be addressed with this piece of legislation that has been rushed into the parliament and jammed through without the normal process that relates to legislation introduced to this House. This bill has been rushed in and brought on for a debate which will be gagged. All of that unnecessary activity is designed to add to the perception that there is a panic situation that needs to be addressed.

The figure I refer to is to be found at page 14 of the SLATS report. It relates to the total amount of woody vegetation in Queensland. Queensland is a big place. It is a much bigger place than Victoria or South Australia. It is a much bigger place than most Queenslanders realise. To put to an end the suggestion that there is a danger that all of the vegetation in Queensland will be cleared unless we do something, page 14 lists the total area of wooded vegetation in Queensland in 2001 at 81 million hectares. Honourable members should compare that with the area that has been cleared. The total clearing in Queensland for the 12-month period covered by the SLATS report is 378,000 hectares. That represents 0.46 per cent of the total. Less than half of one per cent of the total is being cleared each year. It is hardly a panic situation, even at that raw data level.

To get a more accurate picture of what is happening, we need to look at what that 378,000 hectares is made up of. This is what the Premier and the minister never do. Each time a SLATS report comes out they grab the total figure and cannot wait to get in front of the television cameras and talk about how it equates to so many football fields. They give the impression that so many football fields of lush green rainforest is being cleared. Television always finds some background shots of wonderful areas somewhere in north Queensland. They say that so many thousand football fields of this type of

vegetation is disappearing each day. Of course, that is not the reality. Anyone who wants to look beyond that shallow approach and look at the figures in the government reports can very quickly identify the reality.

Of the 378,000 hectares cleared, some 152,000 hectares is listed in table 2 on page 19 as non-remnant vegetation. That leaves 225,200 hectares of remnant vegetation cleared. That is the most relevant figure, but of course it is never mentioned. Those who are trying to promote this as some sort of political initiative grab the highest figure they can find, rush in front of a television camera and, as the minister and the Premier are wont to do, call people cowboys and all sorts of names to try to perpetuate the myth that we have a panic situation.

The other part of the SLATS report which puts that myth to rest can be found on page 8. It relates to how the SLATS data is determined. It states—

The statistics for vegetation change and woody vegetation cover quoted in this report include all woody vegetation. This includes remaining areas of native vegetation, disturbed areas of native vegetation, regrowth, plantations of native and exotic species and domestic woody vegetation.

It includes everything. The SLATS data identifies change in vegetation cover.

In the briefings I received from the minister's department I took time to establish just what each of those categories covered. I took particular care to have it confirmed by the staff who were providing those briefings that domestic woody vegetation includes things such as lantana, rubber vine and prickly acacia. So domestic woody vegetation includes weeds—pests—that farmers have to clear on a routine basis. Those officers confirmed and acknowledged that the clearing of that type of vegetation would obviously be picked up by the SLATS data and would be part of that figure. It is necessary to understand how those figures are arrived at before we start using them to sensationalise and hype the issue.

The other categories listed on that page are a lot easier to understand—things such as the harvesting of plantations of pine. It is pretty easy to understand that it is a bit unfair to include that in the total figure of clearing when talking about whether the level of clearing is too high or requires special legislation such as we see before the House today. The figures I have given are available for anyone who wants to look for them.

The minister took exception to my using another figure the other day. I understand why that is the case: it certainly causes some embarrassment for him and presents some difficulty for him and other members of this House who are trying to perpetuate the myth that we have a huge problem that has to be addressed. That figure relates to total woody vegetation in Queensland. Honourable members will remember that earlier I indicated that the total figure for 2001 is given as 81 million hectares on page 14. It is repeated through the document. In the second paragraph on page 14 of the report the authors acknowledge that this total figure is more than the previous estimate of 76 million hectares—some five million hectares more. Some five million hectares more vegetation was recorded in 2001 than in the earlier SLATS reports.

The point that the minister made the other day in the parliament about the advances in satellite detection technology is certainly valid, but there also needs to be a recognition that the encroachment and the thickening that is happening with woody vegetation right across the state need to be recognised as part of that five million hectare increase. But of course it is not recognised by the minister, the Premier and members of the government because they are more interested in perpetuating the myth that we have a huge problem which needs to be addressed in the legislation that is before the House today.

Other arguments have been advanced to try to justify that panic approach, that looming disaster type approach to natural resource management. Quite often in media statements aimed at an urban audience we hear doom and gloom predictions. The Premier uses the salinity argument all the time. The Minister for Natural Resources' favourite argument is salinity, although I must say he has not used it quite as readily as he used to before he took up my invitation to come out into the real world for a day to see if we could find some salinity.

Just to remind members of the House, the Minister for Natural Resources stood up here and told the House that he had a travel pack for me, that he was going to come out and show me where these 40,000 hectares of salinity were and that he would report to the House when he got back about how he would embarrass me and make a fool of me. Well, he came out and we spent all day in a convoy of departmental Toyotas driving around trying to find this salinity. We found about five hectares out of the 48,000 hectares, and it was just as I told the minister it would be: small isolated incidents of salinity that are widely separated. The minister certainly got the idea after he had been jammed into a departmental Toyota and driven for 120 kilometres to find the next patch.

I am sure the minister remembers that day. I certainly remember the dishevelled uncomfortable look the minister had by the time he had finished driving around central Queensland in an environment that he clearly was not comfortable in to try to find those five hectares. Talk about a fish out of water!

We saw the minister in an environment that was certainly a surprise to him but it was exactly as I had been telling him in this House in regards to salinity in central Queensland.

I remember the minister saying that other areas were worse and that he was going to show me those areas. I am still waiting for the invitation to find the other 47,995 hectares, but I doubt I will get that invitation because I know the minister certainly did not enjoy his first experience in discovering the real salinity situation in central Queensland. I take this opportunity today to reassure the minister that I am more than prepared to be available should he wish to repeat the experience.

The same situation exists with the threat to the Barrier Reef. We saw it the other day when debating Moreton Bay in this House. Somehow tree clearing is roped in as a demonised activity; some bogeyman that is responsible for everything that is wrong in the world. We get the impression that if only we could stop those nasty farmers clearing trees then everything would be wonderful. All of the problems of the world would somehow be solved and everyone would live happily ever after, such is the fairytale that is being promoted for political purposes by a government that does not understand the realities of the natural resource situation.

It behoves us to look at the history of natural resource management under the Beattie Labor government, and vegetation management in particular. We have a vegetation management regime in Queensland that was never accepted by the stakeholders. The original proposition was never accepted by the stakeholders when it was introduced into this House by the then minister, Minister Welford. It was the cause of a couple of major protest marches—one in Winton and one in Roma—where the Premier gave certain commitments to the crowd under the pressure that was exerted upon him at those protest meetings in regard to compensation. It is compensation that has always been the great failure of this Vegetation Management Act that has been in place in Queensland for some three years. It was the total lack of that legislation to recognise the need for compensation that has led to its dismal failure.

There have been a number of debates in this place where I, on behalf of the opposition, have introduced amendments and made arguments for the inclusion of a compensation provision within that legislation. Had that compensation provision been included either initially in 1999, when the legislation was first introduced, or subsequently at any of those opportunities that the government had, then much of the discontent and many of the problems of non-compliance would have been solved.

The moral argument for the inclusion of a compensation provision cannot be denied. We have a situation where particular individuals are being asked to bear the cost of a provision that is designed to promote a community benefit. Individuals are being asked to accept a restriction on their financial situation for the community benefit. It follows indisputably that if the community require a benefit then the community should be prepared to bear the costs associated with that benefit. If we as a community, we as a group of people, decide that this is worth doing—whatever the 'this' is—then we should be prepared to bear the costs of that and not ask for those costs to be borne by particular individuals.

The minister has a number of times in this House put forward the argument—and the member for Toowoomba North has also put forward the argument—that somehow or other the government cannot afford compensation; it would cost too much. The minister said at a meeting in Cairns which I attended that it would break the state; the state could not afford to do it. It is absurd to argue that we as a community cannot afford to do something and yet we expect individuals to bear that cost. How can we possibly assume that a small group of individuals can afford the cost that we collectively as a community cannot afford?

That is a question for the member for Toowoomba North, because he has stood in this place and talked about the fact that the state cannot afford it, that the community cannot afford it. But the other side of his argument is that that group of individuals, a small group of individuals, somehow can afford it. Somehow a group of people, be it 3,000 or 5,000 people, can afford the cost of this legislation being imposed upon them, but we as a state, some three and a half or four million people—whatever our population is—cannot afford it. That is an absurd argument.

The benefits that are being sought—and I agree that in many cases those benefits are worth while—are benefits to all of us. They are benefits to the whole community, and the whole community should pay. The whole community should accept the cost. That is an argument that should have been accepted right back at the start when this legislation was first introduced into the House in 1999, and it should have been accepted on the numerous occasions when amendments were put forward in this House by the opposition, and yet it has not been.

The legislation before the House today is supposedly a step in that direction, a step in the direction of arriving at a situation where that compensation provision becomes part and parcel of vegetation management. The way the Beattie Labor government has done that is not to recognise its own moral obligation, not to do the right thing and accept the undeniable arguments that have been put up over the last three and a half years and make provision in its own budget for a compensation element. What it has done is somehow try to shift the responsibility—move the responsibility—to

somebody else, blame somebody else for the fact that we do not have a compensation provision and therefore the legislation is not working. Of course, that somebody else in this case is the federal government. The state government has been in negotiations for quite a long time now trying to move that responsibility from where it rightfully belongs—here with the Beattie Labor government—to the federal government.

There can be no justification for that in itself, because the southern states have accepted the responsibility for compensation within the vegetation management regimes that have been introduced in those states and there is no precedent for the type of shifting of responsibility that the Beattie government has tried to undertake over the last three and a half years while Queensland land-holders have suffered under the failed Vegetation Management Act. Numerous problems have been encountered over that three and a half years. The first major problem that was encountered and still exists today, albeit not to the same extent, is the extent to which the Department of Natural Resources was grossly underprepared and grossly underfunded for the implementation of the legislation. There was a huge failure by the Department of Natural Resources to have the available information, the data sets, the mapping and just the capability on the ground to put this legislation in place, and that is in keeping with the way the legislation was introduced.

The minister, the Premier and the other members of the government were not interested, and probably still are not interested, in how the legislation works out in the field. What they wanted was the political points. They wanted the media headlines. They wanted the media opportunities. They wanted to sell the perception to an urban community that somehow they had made heroes of themselves by introducing this legislation. The actual practical implementation of the legislation was not something that anyone turned their mind to. They did not turn their mind to it simply because it was going to cost money. It was always going to cost money, because the Department of Natural Resources, like the Department of Primary Industries, has been underfunded and underresourced for so long that the capacity within both of those departments is a small fraction of what it used to be.

The Department of Natural Resources certainly did not have the capacity to implement the legislation, and in many areas it still does not. Much of the information that is being used in the administration of this piece of legislation has been shown to be substandard and misleading. That has become apparent in the negotiations that have been going on between the state government and the federal government, and it will become increasingly apparent in the weeks ahead when the state government will be required to justify some of the positions that it has established as fact merely by the process of repetition rather than by establishing any sort of scientific basis. That was another reason the legislation has been so thoroughly rejected by the community and there was a degree of non-compliance with the legislation.

The last time we debated this legislation we saw the penalties and prosecution provisions that set out to make it even easier for the department to prosecute people who it believed were not complying with the legislation as it was. Again we saw a continuation of the same approach—hype it up, sensationalise it, turn it into a political issue, demonise people, call them names, wind the issue up for the headlines and the urban media, milk it for political points, and jam the legislation through without proper debate and proper consideration. That is what we saw then, and it is what we are seeing now. That whole process combined with this process is, I believe, in direct contrast to what is happening out there in the field. Across the state we have the regional vegetation management planning process in place and in most cases that process is very nearly completed. Most of those regional vegetation management plans have been submitted in draft form to the government and the minister for his approval. Some of them—seven or eight, I think the figure is—

Mr Shine: Are you going to talk about this bill?

Mr SEENEY: I think seven or eight have been released for public comment and public consultation. I will tell the member for Toowoomba North what this bill does. If he read it and understood the situation instead of coming in here with a departmental brief that somebody in the department has written—

Mr SHINE: I rise to a point of order. The honourable member's comment is wrong, wrong, wrong and I ask him to withdraw it.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Liddy Clark): Order! There is no point of order.

Mr SEENEY: No, there is no point of order. I look forward to the day that the member for Toowoomba North comes in here and tells us what he thinks about vegetation management instead of coming in and reading prepared speeches. But we will never see that.

Mr SHINE: I rise to a point of order. The honourable member for Callide is repeating a statement that is wrong and offensive. I have not got a departmental briefing.

Mr SEENEY: I do not think we will ever see a situation where the member for Toowoomba North comes in here and tells us what he thinks for two reasons: one, he cannot tell us; and, two, he cannot think.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: I remind the member for Callide to stick to the bill.

Mr SHINE: I rise to a point of order. Madam Deputy Speaker, that is offensive. I ask for it to be withdrawn.

Mr SEENEY: I withdraw. Obviously—

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Unreservedly.

Mr SEENEY: Obviously, Madam Deputy Speaker—

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: No, not 'obviously', member for Callide.

Mr SEENEY: Okay. I withdraw.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you.

Mr SEENEY: I withdraw and I apologise in deference to the sensitivities of the member for Toowoomba North.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member will continue to discuss matters relevant to the bill.

Mr SEENEY: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and perhaps I can continue without the assistance of the member for Toowoomba North.

The legislation before the House seeks to throw out that regional vegetation management planning process, and that in itself is a sleight and an insult to the people who have been involved in that process from its very beginning back in 1999. It seeks to override that process. The legislation before the House is part of a proposal to effectively end the clearing of remnant vegetation in Queensland and to severely restrict the clearing of regrowth, I fear. In so doing, it completely negates the work that has been done in good faith by many people. A lot of people who have given their own time have contributed to that regional vegetation management planning process, and all of that will be for naught.

It is part of the misinformation and the facade that has been created. That is, in some of the statements that ministers and the Premier have made, they have said that somehow this regional vegetation management planning process will have a role in the new regime that will operate, even though we are not going to be clearing any remnant vegetation. It is supposedly all going to be brought to an end by 2006 and clearing of regrowth is supposed to be as of right under the Vegetation Management Act. This planning process is somehow going to have a role.

I would be interested in exploring the detail of that with the minister during the committee stage, because it is a proposal that is easy to put forward in the context of a media conference and to people who do not understand the detail of that planning process and the detail of the proposal being put forward by the state government when looking for federal government funding. I will look forward to exploring the detail of that and exposing just now nonsensical is the proposal that somehow the regional vegetation management process will continue to have a role in vegetation management once this proposal that is being developed, the government hopes at least, is accepted.

The legislation today simply establishes a moratorium on the processing of applications and, in that respect, it is totally irrelevant to the process. Its only relevance is to add to that facade and myth that somehow there is a huge problem that has to be addressed and addressed quickly. In reality there has been something of a moratorium already imposed. There has been a go-slow in terms of the department's approach to the processing of permits. I have dealt with people who become frustrated by the fact that it is two years since they put in their application and it still has not been processed or that when other people do get their applications processed they get approval for a very small percentage of the area that the application covers—all of those types of things that indicate that there is a deliberate attitude on the part of the department to slow down any legitimate activity under the Vegetation Management Act.

We have to ask: why on earth do we need this legislation? Why on earth do we need this moratorium to be put in place at all? Of course, the answer is, as I have referred to before, that it is simply a political stunt to continue the political hype rather than to address the reality of the issue. But more than that, it treats land-holders and stakeholders with total contempt. There was no consultation about the changes being proposed in this legislation. There was no consultation at all with the stakeholders in terms of what the proposals would be and how they would be put in place. The arguments being put forward are that somehow or another this moratorium will be slammed into place and then the state government will consult with stakeholders, that this legislation today is necessary to put an end to this huge scary problem that is happening and then they are going to consult. Nobody believes that. No-one believes that the consultation that may take place will be real consultation. We have a situation where stakeholders will be manipulated into agreeing. All of that process has gone on behind the backs of stakeholders while they have been engaged in good faith in the regional vegetation management planning process. It is all about political hype rather than science. It is all

about extending the political benefits that the Beattie government has tried to milk from the vegetation management planning process.

The legislation very simply consists of four clauses. It deems applications received to be not properly made. I think those are the words used in the legislation. One of the worrying things about the legislation and the moratorium that it puts in place is that it is indefinite. There is no indication about what would be an acceptable period for this moratorium to be in place and for any sort of an agreed outcome to be arrived at.

There are a number of other moratoriums that have been put in place by the Department of Natural Resources in regard to other natural resource management issues. If we are trying to establish how long this moratorium is likely to be in place, it is worth looking at how some of those other moratoriums have operated. Some of them have been in place now for four and five years and show no signs of being changed. It is reasonable for people to expect that this will be the same situation. If the government is going to maintain any credibility with this legislation, and if the government wants this legislation to be accepted by the stakeholders in the community, a valid approach would be to set a time limit for this moratorium, to set some parameters within which this consultation is to take place and the proposal being put forward by the state government is to be considered, and to set some parameters and to make sure that the department and the government enter into this in good faith with the intention of arriving at a solution rather than achieving a political outcome.

In looking at the legislation I think it would be very easy to set up a time frame of three months. That would be an appropriate period to allow the consultation that the government talks about to take place. It would provide a time line for all the stakeholders to agree that within that three-month period we are going to bring this consultation and negotiation period to an end and we are going to get a proposal in place that will allow people to get on with their lives and get on with conducting their business. There needs to be a fair and equitable system in place. It is time to get fair dinkum about vegetation management in Queensland. It is time to put an end to the political game playing that the Beattie Labor government has engaged in for so long. It is time to put away the political football and get a resolution to this issue to address some of the very valid arguments that are being put forward by stakeholders, to engage those stakeholders in the process in a way that will ensure that those stakeholders have some confidence in the outcome. That is what needs to be done and it needs to be done quickly. It needs to be done within a specified time frame, not under a moratorium that can conceivably go on forever.

Let us look at the proposal being put forward for consideration for consultation under this moratorium that this legislation puts in place. Let us look at some of the absurdities contained within that. I would suggest that at this stage the details are very broad. There is a relative lack of information and detail, as there always is, because the people driving these agendas are driving them for political outcomes rather than dealing with the practical detail. The proposal seeks to bring a total end to the clearing of remnant vegetation by 2006. It seeks to do that within a compensation regime of \$150 million, which is the figure that has been mentioned in the media, with \$75 million being sought from the federal government and \$75 million from the state government.

I would agree that the response that has come from major stakeholder groups, almost without exception, that that \$150 million is woefully inadequate, is self-evident. The government cannot argue that the impact of such a move can be properly compensated for by \$150 million. It is absurd to argue that.

Mr Shine interjected.

Mr SEENEY: The member for Toowoomba North once again interjects about the federal government. I think the federal government has made the mistake of accepting the figures of the Department of Natural Resources in Queensland. A number of times in this House over a number of debates I have illustrated just how inadequate are the figures of the Department of Natural Resources. They are totally inadequate.

That is not the fault of the people working in the Department of Natural Resources; it is the fault of every government member in this House, because over subsequent budgets that department has been starved of funds and deprived of the capacity to produce the data that is necessary upon which to base these decisions. That is exactly what is happening. We have this figure of \$150 million, which sounds like a heck of a lot to people who do not understand the impact that this proposal is going to have.

I believe that a number of issues have to be addressed. I do not believe that we can get to a point where there is a total ban on remnant vegetation clearing in Queensland because of the large areas of Queensland that are still relatively undeveloped. Certainly, there are areas where the potential exists for quite intensive development of industries that have the potential to provide a large economic boost to individuals and communities. There can be a differentiation made between the clearing of remnant vegetation for intensive activities and broadacre clearing for pasture development that has a

relatively low return. So there needs to be some sort of flexibility to allow for that type of development to proceed. It is just unreasonable and unacceptable to shut down completely those development opportunities across that large area of Queensland. That will never receive my support and I believe that it will not receive the support of the stakeholders, who understand the extent of the opportunities that would be lost if that were to occur.

The other issue that needs to be addressed in the consideration of this proposal is the definition of 'regrowth' within the government's Vegetation Management Act—the original legislation. It is a bit of a complex task to look through the legislation and find how regrowth is defined, but essentially regrowth is defined as anything that is not remnant vegetation. Remnant vegetation is anything that exceeds 50 per cent of its original height or 70 per cent of its foliage cover. There have been a number of instances that illustrate just how unworkable that definition is. It does not take a lot of investigation into the issue to understand that it was always going to be unworkable and it always will be unworkable because of the characteristics of the vegetation and the ecosystem that we are talking about.

We need a management regime that allows previously cleared land to be maintained in its cleared state so that there cannot be this continual encroachment of vegetation and continual thickening of vegetation which, in many instances that I am aware of, has led to areas that obviously were not remnant vegetation a few years ago now being classified as remnant vegetation under the department's mapping facilities. It is not hard to imagine that, over time, more and more of that productive land will suddenly become unproductive, because as that thickening and encroachment happens it passes the point where suddenly the department considers it to be remnant vegetation; it can no longer be maintained. That thickening and encroachment goes unchecked to a point at which, in terms of pastoral production, it is no longer viable. The only definition that will work is one that allows land-holders to maintain cleared land in a cleared state. I believe that that issue needs to be an important part of the consideration of any proposal that is going to be put together under the terms of this moratorium. That is an important element of the Vegetation Management Act that has been shown to be unworkable. In terms of this process, that must be addressed.

The other issue that must be addressed in terms of the proposal that is going to be considered under this moratorium is the complete lack of trust and cooperation between the department and the stakeholders. That has been destroyed totally by the political game playing that I spoke about earlier and about which I have spoken in this House many times. There is no longer any trust. We need all of the available information to be available to all of the stakeholders so that it can be verified independently and we can arrive at a conclusion on the agreed science. That is an essential first step towards arriving at any reasonable outcome.

I well remember, back at the beginning of the debate on vegetation management legislation in this House, a good example of why the trust and cooperation between the department and the stakeholders has been destroyed. The government commissioned a study into the impact of the original vegetation management legislation when it was put together in 1999. From memory, I am pretty sure that it was the Primary Industries Department that actually undertook that study. At the time it was commonly known and it was reported that that impact was measured at some \$500 million. But that report was never released. If the Minister for Primary Industries wants to make a contribution to finding a resolution to this problem, then he would have his department release that report and whatever other information his department might have—and so would the Minister for Natural Resources. He would make that information available and put it all on the table.

Mr PALASZCZUK: I rise to a point of order. The honourable member is misleading the House.

Mr Shine: Again.

Mr PALASZCZUK: Again. That 1999 report—and I can remember it very clearly—unfortunately was a discredited report. It was discredited by the director-general of the Department of Primary Industries and it was thrown in the bin where it belonged.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Liddy Clark): There is no point of order.

Mr SEENEY: It was discredited only because it did not suit the government's purposes. So it was never released. That is the truth of the matter.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Continue with the bill, please.

Mr SEENEY: If this bill is going to achieve anything, then that study needs to be released. If the study is so lacking in integrity, then it will be seen by the stakeholders as lacking in integrity. I ask the Minister for Primary Industries to put the study on the table and put forward his case as to why it is lacking, why it should be discredited, and let the stakeholders be the judge. Unless the minister does that—unless the government departments do that—then it is too easy for the government departments to be used as part of this political process that the government is engaged in. So that is the second issue that needs to be part of any proposal that is going to be negotiated under this moratorium legislation—an openness and an inclusiveness in regard to the available information and the available data upon which the decisions are going to be made.

The third issue is one that I have mentioned before, and that is the compensation principle. But, once again, we need some independent analysis of that. We need some sort of position that we can all agree on in terms of arriving at an acceptable compensation figure. Of course, the first thing that the government has to do is accept the fact that there needs to be compensation. It has to accept the argument that the community has to pay for the benefits that the community wants. The state Labor government has never done that. It has never accepted that argument and it has never paid one dollar in compensation in the three and a half years that this legislation has been in place.

If the government wants to try to establish some good faith in the negotiations, that is the first step. There then needs to be an independent approach to ensure that that compensation regime has integrity. The last thing is land-holder involvement and inclusion, because consultation must be more than words. It has to be real involvement and real consultation, because it is inevitable that the command and control type approach that the Beattie Labor government has tried to take to vegetation management in its politically motivated pieces of legislation before this House will never work. The command and control type legislation is the wrong approach to take in any situation.

It is even less likely to work in a situation where the government is controlling activities across a huge area of Queensland where command and control is always going to be very difficult from a practical administration point of view. We are talking about large areas of Queensland, quite large distances and a very small number of departmental officers. Command and control is never going to work, irrespective of the improvements in the satellite technology and irrespective of how many pieces of legislation the government puts in this House to make it easier to prosecute people that it believes are in breach of the act.

In conclusion, this moratorium is unnecessary. It would never have been necessary had there been a reasonable approach adopted by the Beattie Labor government to vegetation management in this state. It is a political stunt. It is a continuation of an approach that is deplorable and should be rejected. It is an approach that has tried to hype up vegetation management and turn it into a political football.

Time expired.