



Speech by

Mr M. HORAN

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

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VEGETATION MANAGEMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (8.01 p.m.): I am proud to stand here on behalf of the National Party and tell the truth, talk about things with some accuracy and not be a political hypocrite that misleads people and runs misleading advertising programs. Those who play on people by portraying those on the land as economic vandals show the bulldozers with the chains but never show the buffel grass that is left behind. I want to put some of these issues to rest. At the outset, most people on the land, like most people in the cities, want to see the environment protected. They want to see it sustained. They do not want to maintain any of the mistakes of the past.

Let us take south-east Queensland and the previous speaker's electorate of Hervey Bay as an example. Hervey Bay was once pristine beaches and scrub all the way down to the edge of the beach. Now there are massive shopping centres, housing developments, concrete driveways, bitumen roads and all the rest of it. As it is in the cities, as we develop and mature we endeavour to develop botanical gardens and have subdivisions done in a better and more balanced way in order to try to preserve certain corridors or preserve certain tree species. We do all of that to try to do things better, and so it has been on the land.

We heard the member for Fitzroy talk about the history of the land of the Brigalow development, and some of it he did not get right. What happened with many of those blocks in central Queensland was that there were hundreds of thousands of acres originally. They were broken down and people were able to ballot for them. When I was 18 or 19 and living in Brisbane, my mates and I all thought that it would be great to win one of the ballots. However, we could not afford the deposit, which was only \$10,000 at the time, and we did not have the experience. But for many young people it was their dream. The people who got those 30,000 acre blocks lived in a shed with their wife and a couple of toddlers for years.

As the member for Fitzroy said, a condition of drawing those ballots was that they had to clear a certain amount each year. They had to put in fences and so forth. Back then one could not ride a horse through that country, but now it is highly productive land with buffel grass and dams. There are certain amounts of vegetation preserved as they have become more modern and more attuned to the environmental needs of the Brigalow area. That has made central Queensland. It has made Rockhampton. It has made electorates like Fitzroy with the massive amount of economic employment through the likes of the Gracemere saleyards. That was repeated all through the central highlands, all down the Wandoan and Taroom area and all down the west. It is still happening in parts of the west at the moment whilst tree clearing is allowed.

Let us talk about the good people, because they make up about 95 per cent of people in all professions—whether it is people on the land, politicians, police or whoever we like to talk about. However, there are always a few people who make a bad name for the rest of them. We have heard about people who panicked during the late 1990s and went through their land with bulldozers and chains because there was great uncertainty about what was going to happen with government. But let us talk about the good people and the advances that have happened. Yes, people have realised that they have to manage their properties in a sustainable way so that, first of all, it maintains its fertility and makes a profit. The land has to have contours so that the soil does not wash away. They have introduced things such as zero till and minimum till where the ground is hardly disturbed at all and the moisture is retained. When they clear the land now they leave the slopes, the creek banks and nature strips where animals can get from one part of a preserved tree area to another part.

That is happening through the Landcare groups that look after the various watercourses through to the farmers groups. I can give the House an example on the Darling Downs on the blacksoil plains area around Brookstead, probably the best farming country in the world. Generally speaking, it was open blacksoil plains. Trees would not grow and cannot grow there because the heavy black soil cracks open and trees just die. All of the farmers in that area have introduced not only laser levelling, minimum till and ways of maintaining moisture and preserving the land in the absolutely best condition but also magnificent garden areas around their homes. In the big ring tanks covering 60 acres on the blacksoil they have built islands on the middle for bird life. They have made parks in some of the intersections of the roads and planted trees and put bales of barley straw all through those parks so that the black soil does not crack open and kill the trees that they have planted.

They are just some examples of the things that people have done. Some 95 per cent or more of farming communities now are involved in landcare. They want their property to be well developed. They want to do it responsibly. It is the same in the cities. What about the massive industrial estates with acres and acres of galvanised iron roofs radiating heat? We do not complain about that because we know that it is necessary because people have to have jobs. I heard the member for Moggill talking earlier about how the Liberals are going to support this legislation. I heard him before the election on the radio talking about Moggill Road and the fact that it should be widened into a four-lane road. He wants more and more cars to be able to use Moggill Road so more people can drive.

If one looks at south-east Queensland, it is almost wall to wall houses from the border up to Noosa. We have to be environmentally aware of the need to manage those subdivisions better. We have to be environmentally aware of the need to manage our industrial estates better. More and more people are driving cars and demanding four-lane highways, tunnels, bridges, roads and everything else. There was a report in the paper the other day about Ergon Energy and the unprecedented use this last summer of airconditioners. I think the use of airconditioners virtually doubled. There are more and more coal-fired power stations, more and more vehicles on the road and a greater population density in south-east Queensland and in other parts of state with 85,000 people coming through. All of them have to have a house to live in, and every 640 acres is going to be clear felled.

One only has to ask any developer. If they try to sell a block with a gum tree on it, people say that they will buy it if they cut the gum tree down because it is only going to fall on the Colorbond roof. They build a house. They plan a nice little landscape with a few little Italian hedges and a few pot plants, and that replaces the pristine Australian bushland that we had. But we are all realistic and practical enough to realise that people have to have a home. We have to accommodate these things and try to balance it off by having some parklands, some nature strips, some national parks and some greenbelt areas so we can balance the pressures of high density, high population, high industrial living, high transport needs and high energy needs in south-east Queensland or other cities with the needs of the people.

That is what has been happening in rural Queensland where those areas have had to be gradually developed. In many of those places it has taken generations to develop them. If one drew a block of 30,000 acres, they may only have been in a position where they could clear and develop 500 acres about every third, fourth or fifth year. They might have got to the point where the kids have to go to boarding school, so that means there may have been four or five years where they could not afford it or there is a drought and they do not have the money to do the suckers while trying to put the kids through school. Many boarding schools in Toowoomba have given people accounts on credit to help them out because they simply could not afford the school fees due to drought or cattle slumps or other circumstances.

These places had to be done gradually, and clearing is only part of it. The scrub is pulled down and it has to stay there. A year or two later there has to be a roaring hot day in the summer to start a fire to burn it properly. Then it has to be aerially seeded. Then the buffel grass comes up. This is what I am saying about television: it never shows the result. Then it has to be stocked sensibly to maintain the buffel grass population and the suckers have to be continually treated as they pop up. It is an ongoing thing from generation to generation. It takes a lifetime for one family. Then the next generation takes it on or the place gets sold and it gets developed further on. That is how it happens and it can only happen gradually.

For example, someone might have bought a block in 1992 or whatever thinking it will take 20 years to complete a project because they can only do so much at a time. They develop property plans. They have good management plans for the way they will operate the property, maintain its fertility, its biodiversity and everything else. When we talk to some of those people about the developed country they will say, 'If you put a dam in where it is all treed, you'll end up with dirty muddy water. Put a dam in where it's been properly developed, you've got good buffel grass and good standard grass, and you'll get clean water in your dam. You could almost drink it.' That says something about sustainability and what grass can do for land. Let us look at all the photosynthesis values of grass. We are replacing trees

with all their leaves and surface area with a bigger surface area from buffel grass and pasture, of course keeping the shade lines and so forth.

Mr Robertson interjected.

Mr HORAN: I am just talking generally. I am not a scientist, but I know enough about vegetation and grasses. I know enough about the reflection of the sun off shiny roofs in industrial estates and the fumes and power coming out of air conditioners and trucks, and trees being cleared to build brick houses. I know enough about those things to make proper and accurate comparisons.

As this development has happened in Queensland, it has brought about economic development. It has meant exports. Instead of useless bragalow that one could not walk through, we have well-developed properties that have to be managed. Those properties work in partnership with the warehouses on the coast that provide polypipe, pumps, car parts, machinery parts or other equipment, and that provides an overall economic benefit.

That is sensible and balanced development of rural Queensland in the same way that we are trying to have sensible and balanced development in south-east Queensland. It means recognising and respecting hardworking people. People who live on the coast need homes, they need somewhere to work and they need a way to get to work. We need to be sensible about providing those things while trying to do the best for the environment. On the other hand, in rural Queensland we need to recognise that people want to have balanced, sustainable farms. They should be able to do an amount of development that enables their properties to grow and to be developed to their full potential whilst maintaining environmental aspects of the property, associated national parks and so on. That is the way it should be done. That is fair to all sections of the community.

What we are seeing through this whole process is a vile politicisation and a misleading of people, as evidenced by the very fact that during the election campaign there was targeted advertising of city seats. I am not being critical, but the average person who lives in the suburbs—such as the electorate of Mount Coot-tha, whose member I have heard speak—would not be aware of issues concerning the balanced, sustainable, good development of properties with buffel grass, good stocking rates, portions kept, creeks looked after, national parks and so on looked after, property plans, Landcare groups and so on. The average person would not know about that.

However, someone can show footage of a couple of dozers and the chains between them—and the media is just as culpable as the political parties for this—but the end result of the balanced farm, the buffel grass and the jobs that are created right through the chain are not shown. Then they say, 'Isn't it dreadful what they're doing?' They do not show the dozers clearing hundreds of acres between the Tweed and Noosa. They do not show the big industrial estates, the hundreds of thousands of airconditioners, the four lanes of traffic or the power stations. They just show this one thing, because this group is vulnerable.

There are only a limited number of electorates involved. There are 53 seats out of 89 in south-east Queensland. This is where many people are getting fed up with politicians. I find it frustrating that politicians cannot stand up and be a bit truthful about these matters. They use these things. They grin and they say, 'Yeah, we won the election and this is what we promised, and never mind the people on the land. Don't worry about them. We'll just look after our own patch. Don't be truthful and faithful to the whole of Queensland. Don't be honest.' They just encourage the perception that there are D9s with ships' chains between them pulling down millions of hectares, that there are deserts being created and salination problems. These are all the lies and propaganda that have been spread about this issue. I reckon this has been one of the most dishonest and shameful periods in Queensland.

I well remember what happened with Cubbie Station and the lies and deceit that went on. It was the common working men and women at Dirranbandi who rose up and packed the hall when they were lied to about running the water to Narran Lakes, when they were lied to about the national competition policy and when they were lied to about all the salinity issues. They did not have the millions of dollars that this government had to put out maps showing red everywhere, trying to say that we have a salt encrusted moonscape when the opposite was the case.

We are not Victoria and we do not have a winter climate. We have different geography and climate altogether. We have a summer rainfall and a different soil topography. Anyway, the country people are aware of these things and they are farming and managing their properties in a more modern way. They are making up for their mistakes of the past in the way that those who live in the cities and in south-east Queensland learn from our mistakes of the past. I grew up in Moorooka, a suburb of Brisbane. All that area was clear-felled. We will not see subdivisions done that way now because we have learned from our mistakes. We try to make developments a little bit more environmentally friendly with a strip here for koalas, parklands et cetera. As city people have learnt by their mistakes, so have rural people. They are entitled to a fair and honest go in this whole process.

Even though the minister is carrying out the bidding of his master strategist, and Mr Beattie is regarded as a smart politician, at the end of the day I do not know whether smartness rules over truth. I

bet that the minister has been around and seen some wonderful places for development. He has probably been fulsome in his praise of those properties. He knows that he could continue doing that. He knows that there are 82 million hectares of cover over Queensland. He knows that the balanced sustainable allowable development done to a property plan and a vegetation plan would maintain the balance in the same way that we have kept balance in south-east Queensland. I am sure that he knows that in his heart and he knows that this is not working to true science and doing things in a right way with balance. This is just politics and nothing else, and blow the people.

The government won the election and it thinks that it can do what it likes. Isn't it a shame to think that the government panders to the preferences of minority groups? It is not game to stand up in its own right and say, 'We'll get in on our own votes.' It panders to these groups and it is prepared to do it to the most vulnerable in this state because it finds them an easy target. I think that plenty of people in this House need to examine their consciences.

This legislation is being passed for smart political reasons, not for the right and true reasons and not for the reasons that they would apply in their own electorates. They would not dare. The member for Toowoomba North would not dare stop the developers of Highfields from clearing and developing. Because of population increases there, they need a new tavern and a new shopping centre. It is a beautiful area. He would not dare say, 'No more clearing. You all have to live in high rises in the middle of Toowoomba because we want to maintain a pristine development.' It is about balanced development. We are not seeing balanced thinking and we are not seeing balanced development in this debate tonight.

Queenslanders should start to wake up. They should start to look after their fellow man a little as well as the environment. They should realise that we are all in the same boat. We will not solve the problems of the environment by demonising those people in the few electorates that rely on the land for their income. We are demonising people who live in coastal electorates like Burnett and Fitzroy where there are massive problems with suckers. The gum trees come up in cleared country like hair on a cat's back. They may get to a period when the prices for their produce are down or there has been a dry spell and they cannot afford to treat suckers. Because of the uncertainty in some of this legislation, they will not know what they can do with the suckers if they get to a certain height and they cannot afford to treat them. What on earth will they do?

Mr Robertson: In perpetuity.

Mr HORAN: I will give the minister this: from what I have seen he has addressed the sucker issue—I hope—but the shadow minister will certainly deal with that when it comes to consideration of the clauses. That enormous uncertainty about suckers is driving some rural communities mad. They need certainty about the suckers and no changes in the future.

Mr Robertson: In perpetuity is a long time!

Mr HORAN: I am pleased that the minister has said that it is in perpetuity. Let us hope he will not put in place the 'green police', who drive people mad and frighten the whole community. It does happen. Actually, I suppose that will not happen because the government has gutted the department of staff. I have heard there has not been a land officer at Charleville for the past two months.

A lot of people from the other side have said about this bill that the government is delivering on an election promise. That election promise was based on crass politics and not on truth, not on science and not on respect for people who live in certain parts of this state. It was doing to those people what those on the other side of the House would not be game to do to their own electorate. That is the unfairness and the dishonesty of the whole process. I think it is a shame that the people of rural Queensland could not be treated with respect, that they could not be told the truth and that a system of balanced and sustainable development could not be put in place that would allow them to make a reasonable income from the investment and the hard work they have put into their properties over generations.