



Speech by

Mr P. PURCELL

MEMBER FOR BULIMBA

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VEGETATION MANAGEMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr PURCELL (Bulimba—ALP) (3.30 p.m.): I would like to say a few words in regard to the Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, which is being debated today. I would like to remind members of the House why we clear land—why we do what we do.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr PURCELL: My roots in the country probably go back further than the member's, as the member conveniently forgets. My grandfather did not clear land with a bulldozer and a chain; he cleared with an axe. James Purcell was a Labor man all his life and he would be if he was alive today. Anybody who worked with their hands and their back in the scrub knew where their support came from.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr PURCELL: Who does the member think set up all the things that looked after the man on the land? Who does the member think set up all the wheat boards? Who does the member think looked after those people in the bush? I can assure members that it was not the people who are lounging around on the wrong side of the House now. It was Labor governments that understood workers and their needs.

My grandfather cleared land with an axe and a horse. He cleared it to feed his family. He had a large family, because it was good to have a large family. That meant that he had a large work force to help him with clearing land.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr PURCELL: I can assure the member that the girls did their bit also. My aunties could bowl cricket balls and tackle better than my uncles. They were fearsome. When I went to school, we used to field our own sides in the small one-teacher schools where I went to school. It was the Purcells against the rest and we inevitably won, because the girls were with us.

We forget why we cleared land. We cleared land to make a living. We cleared land because in those days the government of the day encouraged people to go out and clear as much land as they possibly could. Australia was an emerging nation that needed produce to trade with, in those days, Europe and England—where our roots were in those days. The reason we are clearing now—

An honourable member interjected.

Mr PURCELL: I will go the 20 minutes. I will go 40 minutes if the member wants. I think that the reason we clear now is to take large tracts of land. Roughly about two months ago I was coming back from Emerald when I saw four dozers and two chains clear-felling side by side up hill and down dale over creeks.

An honourable member: Regrowth.

Mr PURCELL: It was regrowth. When I drove on a little bit further, the paddocks looked to me as though they had been cleared probably 18 months to two years earlier and had regrowth. But the paddocks had not had anything done to them. They were a mess. People could not graze stock on there. I could hardly walk through the paddock. We stopped and had a look. It was absolutely disgraceful what those people had done. That was not farming, that was not

management. Those people had just taken the dozers in there and destroyed thousands of acres of scrub for little economic benefit. It was certainly not farming, because it had been lying there for years.

An honourable member: Did you see any buffel grass?

Mr PURCELL: I could not walk across the paddock. There was that much timber on the ground, I could not walk across the paddock. There were no trees left in the paddock—not a one. They took every tree in the paddock. There was no buffel grass left there. There was hardly any space left on the ground for the timber that lay there. It was there for two years and the suckers were about twice as high as me. They were 12 feet to 14 feet high. It was regrowth. That is not the way to clear scrub.

This bill will stop that. I heard my colleague the member for Logan talk about dieback. I know the salinity problems that some people have in southern New South Wales and in some places in western Queensland.

Mr Seeney: Where?

Mr PURCELL: Obviously, the member gets struck deaf when he comes in here when members talk about the maps that have been produced. The salinity problems in western Queensland have been mapped for years. The member does not want to know about it. If we want to talk about good farmers and people who know the land, the member should talk to those in northern New South Wales and in some parts of Queensland where they are getting dieback—not from salinity but because there are not enough trees in the area to support the cycle of life of insects, birds and other things that grow naturally in the area. They all get on the few trees that are left and they kill those trees. Those farmers have large replanting programs that are subsidised by the taxpayers of Australia at a cost of millions and millions to put back the trees that have been thoughtlessly taken out by bulldozers and chains.

Mr Seeney: When are they going to start on Bulimba?

Mr PURCELL: The member mentioned Bulimba. He should take a drive through Bulimba. There are probably more trees in my electorate than he would have in his. I can assure the member that people in my electorate are planting trees as fast as they can. The member should come and have a look at my yard. There are trees everywhere—much to my sorrow, when they get into drains and so forth—but they are there.

An honourable member: Any bulldozers there?

Mr PURCELL: Only in memory. We need trees for shade. Main Roads sometimes builds roads through people's properties and the National Highway changes its route and so forth. Members should find out the cost involved in taking trees off somebody's property. When trees are taken out by governments, \$60,000 and \$70,000 is spent on building shade for stock that no longer has any shade.

The members opposite cannot tell me that they agree with what their neighbours and some other people are doing in the bush by felling scrub and what they are doing to the watercourses and the environment. If they are fair dinkum about being farmers and looking after where they live and they want their son, their grandson and their great-grandson to be able to farm the land where they live, they would not be saying what they are saying here today. Those practices are not sustainable. The members opposite know that.

We do not want to reinvent the wheel. Members opposite should look at what is happening in other parts of this country. Those places are no different from Queensland. It is the same sun that comes up and it is the same sun that goes down. We should not have to continue to relearn things. We talk about rain. The members opposite should go and talk to the blokes who are getting a bit long in the tooth. They should talk to some of the blokes who I have been talking to in the past six weeks who are involved in country racing. Inevitably, those blokes have a bit of an age about them. They have been in the industry for a long time. When we get talking to them—not only about what is happening with their tracks but what is happening in their districts and how things have changed—they will bring up the weather and talk about how the rain patterns in their area where they have lived, some of them for 80 years or 90 years, have changed. What has changed in those areas in those blokes' lifetime is the number of trees. Enormous numbers of trees have been taken out. Everybody knows that trees recycle rain in large lumps. If the members want rain, they should not take out all their trees, because that is when they make a desert. Deserts have no trees. Not enough water falls in those areas to sustain trees.

If they continue to take the trees out, the deserts of this country—and, as everyone knows, the majority of this country is desert—will continue to encroach on our farming and grazing lands. I do not think anybody in this House has a problem with the clearing of land correctly for

livestock grazing and for cropping, but we should not do what we are doing at the moment because we are doing it wrong.

Last year I had the opportunity to go and talk to some dairy farmers around Gympie with regard to some water problems they had. It was a bit difficult to get to the property I visited because it was up and back down a few lanes. The bloke met me at a road that we both knew and that I could get to, because some of the areas I was going to were not marked on maps. As we drove down the lanes to get to his place he was berating his neighbours upstream from him about what they were doing to their land. He had only 800 acres. His family had been there for many years and ran a dairy herd that had supported his family. His son is slowly taking over the property.

The owners of the farms around him had not left one tree standing in thousands of acres above him. All the creeks of course ran down through his place to the river. His creeks were silted. He had rubbish coming down because there was nothing to trap the water. It was cutting gullies into the very small acreage that he had which he and his grandfather had farmed very successfully for so many years beforehand. He had to put in place measures to stop the erosion of his creek banks because of the volume of water that was coming down and its pace because of what was done on the properties around him.

What does a good farmer who is doing the right thing do when those around him are destroying their place? They are only there to make a quick quid and to then get out. A lot of them have not been there too long. Two of this man's neighbours had only been there about three years. They wanted to value add—clear it and sell the property—because land prices in that area were growing fairly substantially and will continue to grow. They were not there to farm the land; they were there to make a quick quid. We could probably compare them with some of the developers in the urban areas around Brisbane where they put in no roads, no water, no power; they just want to carve up a block, get their quid and move on and let the purchaser, the councils and everybody else worry about the problems they leave behind.

If we do not have laws to stop that practice it will not cease; people will continue to do that. This legislation will help those farmers and graziers who have a love of the land and want to be able to say to their sons and grandchildren, 'This is your inheritance and it will be here for you for many generations to come. You will be able to successfully farm this area because we have looked after it for you.' Not too many years ago we used to say—and we all used to joke about it—that the worst thing a farmer could do would be to give his son the property because he would be giving something that he would not be able to pay off. It would be heavy with debt and he would not be able to make a living out of it. We do not want that. We want it the other way around, and we need them so badly. We need people in the bush and we need them to be able to make a quid.

This will probably raise some eyebrows on the other side of the House, but collectively I know about the help we are going to give to the sugar industry. We are going to put something like \$600 million into the sugar industry to sustain it. That is a double-edged sword, but the sugar bill is coming up later and I will say something on that. However, we also need to make sure that what we are doing now is for the collective good. People on properties should realise that this bill is not being introduced to make their lives harder but to allow everybody to share in the wealth that we have in those bush areas so that in the years to come we can all benefit from it.

An opposition member: \$150 million won't do it.

Mr PURCELL: \$150 million will not do it?

Mr Mickel: You could go to the federal government to help you out.

Mr PURCELL: I do not know too many countries anywhere in the world—throughout Europe—that will pay people not to cut down trees.

An honourable member: They do all over Europe.

Mr PURCELL: They farm trees, yes, they do. But they will put people up against a fence if they start cutting down trees in certain areas because some of the trees over there have a history. People can tell you the history of that tree or scrub. It is the history of their family in some cases. In England they are trying to save trees and they are planting flat out—and England would fit inside Queensland probably 40 or 50 times. They would love to have the opportunity that we have. We need to make it sustainable.

I think I should turn quickly to a favourite subject of those next door, that is, the hundreds of thousands of acres and square miles that we do not use in this country that should be used. It is a pity that those on the other side of the House do not do something about it. I am talking about the wasted land along our roads. Why do we not have tree-lined thoroughfares along our roads? The grass is taken from them; farmers let their stock out and they pinch all that grass.

They think it is theirs. Why do they not do something about putting a few trees or a bit of something back in there? Then they could probably take a few more trees down off their land. If the thousands and thousands of acres or hundreds of square miles of trees that could be grown there were planted it would bring the rain back to their properties.