



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

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LAND AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (6.12 pm): I rise to speak to the Land and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I have some serious concerns about the bill and the impact that it will have on the stability of Queensland's agricultural and grazing industry. With two-thirds of the state under some form of leasehold agreement with the state government, the potential for harm can be severe. This bill states that landholders can expect the security of tenure to increase so that they can concentrate on their grazing and agricultural activities. But from now on that security of tenure will be based on the conditions of the land. However, how much does the condition of the land depend on factors beyond the control of the leaseholder?

The drought has a huge impact on the sustainability of the industry. I trust that it will be taken into consideration when determining the property plans and the length of the tenure available to leaseholders. I would just like to say that I know about issues relating to drought and the conditions of the land. When I bought my place back in 1988, it was a 240-acre block. It was no inheritance. I paid for it. I am still paying it off right now. I can recall when I bought my first 10 head of cattle—heifers. I placed them on that block and within 12 months, or within less than 12 months, I had another 10 calves. But by the end of the season there was no rain. The rainy season did not come. The following year was exactly the same. By that time, not one single blade of grass or one weed was on that place.

People might say, 'You should have sold them,' but from my perspective I was looking for those seasonal rains to come. I can recall that at that time we received three inches of rain within 30 minutes. After those three inches of rain fell, there was that much water that I could have jumped on a rubber dinghy and sailed to the Burdekin River. However, in the morning I saw from the top of my property that every ounce of topsoil was completely washed away down to the bottom. Do members know what I did? On my property I have what is called a woody weed wattle. I knocked over all the wattle throughout the place. That wattle was able to catch the remaining topsoil that was not washed away during the rain. Little forms of grass started to grow from where those trees had been knocked down. The ground was fertile. The grass started to grow. Then the grass started to spread. If members go to my property right now they would see that the grass is about two feet high.

If this advisory committee had come to my place after I had been through two and a half years of drought and then knocked over those trees, they would have said that I was a bad manager. My land could possibly have been removed from me. These are the circumstances that could be faced by these landowners right now. It is very important that these issues are investigated properly. These factors should be taken into consideration.

The explanatory notes state that these amendments to the Land Act include a range of provisions that will enable the use of performance based processes to achieve sound natural resource management outcomes at the property level. It must be remembered that the average age of graziers is well over 50 and as few of them are financially able to provide work for younger family members, the daily management of these properties is often left to them. Graziers have raised their concerns with me. They want the assurance that after negotiated land management agreements have been put in place and environmental or personal disasters have occurred, the land management agreement will remain valid. For example, if a

leaseholder suffers a marriage break-up, an illness or a plague of grasshoppers and therefore cannot meet the criteria that was willingly agreed to prior to these crises, will the agreement remain valid? If the leaseholder has his land removed unjustly, will he lose his investment? Will he be reimbursed for the cost of the fences, the windmills and the other amenities that he has put in place? If the leaseholder suffers personal trauma or environmental disasters that are out of his control, will he be compensated for the investment that he has made in his leasehold property if it is resumed?

It is not a good thing to remove someone's life investment. We are only born once. We do our best. We work our guts out for most of our lives and then we die. If our life savings are taken off us, then we have nothing. I ask the minister to make sure that safeguards are put in place to ensure that people who lose their land under the provisions of this legislation will be appropriately compensated. This is very draconian legislation. Leaseholders are concerned that after they have worked their guts out for most of their lives—like everyone else here—to try to save for a car or to try to put their children through school, their land is then taken from them. This is a very serious issue and one that needs to be addressed.

Three weeks ago I was at the Jericho campdraft and I spoke to some leaseholders. They told me that a minister in the Bjelke-Petersen government had come to a public meeting that was being held about certain concerns that they had. Those leaseholders asked him a question about upgrading their leases to perpetual leases. At that time the minister asked, 'Why on earth do you want to upgrade your leases to perpetual leases? Pastoral leases are secure.' At that time those leaseholders did not realise that the government was going to change.

In those days, leasehold was not an issue, because they thought—and that particular government thought—that the leases were safe. But now we have spy-in-the-sky satellites, dob-in-a-farmer hotlines and departments full of greenies. Leaseholders just want the assurance that this state rural leasehold land advisory committee will not be full of greenies and instead will be full of thinkers of sound mind who understand the rural industry and rural land management. As I said, if we have these thinkers of unsound mind and if, like I just mentioned, all of my topsoil is washed away and I knock the trees over to create the only way of allowing grass to grow and then to grow to two feet high, under this legislation my land could be removed from me.

Farmers and graziers support the lengthening of the period of tenure as it provides greater security and greater opportunities for forward planning. But, as has been said already, the devil is in the detail. Until the detail is made apparent, farmers and graziers have grave concerns about the possibility of losing their livelihoods and their life's investment owing to overzealous environmental demands.

The myth that landowners are environmental vandals who destroy the Great Barrier Reef, who pump the rivers dry and who deplete the ozone layer is just hypothetical nonsense that is dreamed up by academics, greenies and those who have never got their hands dirty through doing real work. Land management is about sowing the good seed, producing the best beef and then putting that food on the family table. At present, landowners achieve that. They are doing a great job at putting food on our plates.