



Speech by

Mark Ryan

MEMBER FOR MORAYFIELD

Hansard Tuesday, 27 October 2009

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr RYAN (Morayfield—ALP) (6.21 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I would like to start by noting that this bill is about protecting the lifestyles of Queenslanders and about fulfilling commitments—commitments made at the last election and commitments made when the moratorium legislation passed the House.

The commitment made when the moratorium legislation passed the House was a commitment to consult. I have received feedback from not only members of my community but also industry groups that that commitment has been fulfilled. They appreciated the thorough and genuine consultation process undertaken by the minister and the department. To a large extent, they were grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this very important legislation.

I would also like to note the overwhelming contribution from members of my community, the community of the Morayfield state electorate. The people of the Morayfield state electorate care a lot about the environment. They particularly care about their lifestyles. There is a lot of native vegetation in the Morayfield area. People are concerned about the future of that native vegetation. The people of the Morayfield area will welcome this legislation. They will welcome the legislation because it provides certainty and protection of their lifestyles.

I would like to address how the new measures contained in this bill will apply to regrowth vegetation and how this differs from the moratorium and the previous vegetation management framework. Queensland currently has approximately 80 million hectares of native woody vegetation fully protected under the current vegetation management framework. The previous framework provided protection to remnant vegetation on freehold land and about 300,000 hectares of mature regrowth vegetation on agricultural and grazing leasehold land.

The recent regrowth clearing moratorium temporarily extended protection to endangered regrowth and woody native vegetation within 50 metres of watercourses in the priority reef catchments of the Great Barrier Reef. This bill will amend the Vegetation Management Act to allow for the long-term regulation of clearing of high-value regrowth across Queensland and in buffer areas adjoining watercourses flowing into the Great Barrier Reef.

The new regrowth arrangements extend the regulation of mature regrowth from leasehold land to include Indigenous and freehold land and will protect the highest value regrowth vegetation—that is endangered, of-concern and least-concern. Vegetation that is subject to the new regrowth arrangements is identified on a regrowth map which covers about 3.7 million hectares of regrowth vegetation. About 1.4 million hectares of the regrowth vegetation that is shown on the regrowth map has been locked in as category X on certified property maps of assessable vegetation, PMAVs, and is not affected by the new measures.

The new regrowth regulations apply to a total of 2.3 million hectares which is subject to minimum standards and best land management practices under the new code. Of this, the code will protect from clearing about one million hectares of regrowth which was not previously protected. The map covers regrowth vegetation on all tenures, but the legislation will only affect non-urban freehold and Indigenous land and agricultural and grazing leasehold land.

Consistent with the current Vegetation Management Act, only clearing of native woody vegetation is affected. Therefore, grasslands, mangroves and non-native plants including orchards will continue to not be regulated under this act. An important difference to the moratorium arrangements is that the new map only includes regrowth that has not been cleared since 31 December 1989—that is, the vegetation is more than 20 years old.

In discussions, landholders identified real concerns with the moratorium capturing areas that are regularly cleared on a five- to eight-year cycle to maintain production on fertile country. That consultation process was important to the drafting of this bill. I am pleased that the government listened to landholders and ensured that these productive lands are not affected by this bill.

Landholders will be able to identify areas affected by the proposed amendments by referring to a regrowth vegetation map which shows high-value regrowth vegetation and particular watercourses in the priority reef catchments. These maps can be downloaded free of charge from the department's website. To manage this regrowth vegetation on their land, landholders will not have to obtain a permit from the department. A landholder's only obligation is to notify the department of their intention to clear regrowth and to conduct clearing in accordance with the regrowth vegetation code. The notification process ensures the department is aware of the location, which will assist the department in monitoring compliance with the regrowth code.

On freehold land the code protects endangered vegetation as well as of-concern and least-concern vegetation near watercourses and wetlands on steep slopes or on areas that provide essential habitat for threatened species. On leasehold agricultural and grazing land the code protects endangered, of-concern and least-concern vegetation on wetlands and watercourses in essential habitat areas or on steep slopes. Other than essential habitat areas, these requirements are consistent with the current vegetation management arrangements for leasehold land.

The moratorium arrangements applying to all native woody vegetation within 50 metres of watercourses in the high-priority reef catchments will be carried over to the new regrowth arrangements. The only difference is that improved watercourse mapping will be used to identify these watercourses. This includes stream order numbering on the map to make it easier for landholders to manage vegetation under the regrowth vegetation code.

These arrangements under the code represent the minimum standard for landholders to achieve. The code also provides guidelines for landholders to achieve best management practice. I acknowledge that the majority of landholders are already achieving that best management practice benchmark.

This government has kept its word and landholders will continue to have certainty, with PMAVs lodged during the moratorium. These maps lock in category X areas and give landholders certainty to manage vegetation in these areas without requiring approval under the Vegetation Management Act. PMAVs provided certainty under the old vegetation framework, under the moratorium and will continue to do so under this bill.

I would like to conclude my remarks by commending the minister, his staff, the department and the community members who participated in the consultation process for their respective contributions. This bill strikes the right balance between protection of regrowth with the highest biodiversity value and ensuring landholders can continue to manage productive land. This bill is about doing what is right for both the protection of biodiversity in Queensland and continued responsible land use for Queensland. This bill provides certainty and I commend it to the House.