



Speech by

**Ted Malone**

**MEMBER FOR MIRANI**

Hansard Tuesday, 27 October 2009

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## **VEGETATION MANAGEMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr MALONE** (Mirani—LNP) (4.34 pm): I rise to speak on the Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill in the parliament today. Firstly, I congratulate the shadow minister on his very detailed and critical comment of the legislation. Before I say too much, I would like to pass comment on the impassioned speech by the member for Cook in which he defended the farmers who want to protect the revegetation along Walsh River. Quite frankly, this is an indication of how much understanding members on the opposite side of the House have in relation to this bill. Before people can extract any material from anywhere near a creek bed, of course, they have to have an extractive licence, which is quite extensive and very demanding in terms of how they rehabilitate the land afterwards and all of those sorts of things. Quite frankly, before they even get to looking at destroying regrowth in extracting that sand from the river, they would have to have some very substantial plans in place and, more importantly, approval from the department. The revegetation would have nothing whatsoever to do with the extractive industry. This is typical of backbench members on the other side of the House who do not have any understanding of what they are putting through this House.

I am not going to speak at any great length on the bill in terms of what it imposes on landholders et cetera; that has been adequately done by the shadow minister and others members of the House. What I contend to the House today is that in the bush we have a saying along the lines of, 'You do not necessarily listen to what the salesman has to say; you look at what his actions might be.' Quite frankly, we have a situation today where those on the other side of the House would like the voting public to think that they are the custodians of the environment here in Queensland; the Labor Party and the environment are in unison.

I was in Rockhampton last week at those major fires. Some members would have heard me speak during the matters of public importance debate today.

**Government members** interjected.

**Mr MALONE:** It is great to see that members on the other side are so interested in what I have to say. The fire in Rockhampton was in the Mount Archer National Park, which is encompassed within the Berserker wilderness area. It is a very significant part of Queensland—11,000 hectares or 30,000 acres of very significant ecosystems of dry rainforest country. These ecosystems are not replicated anywhere else in Queensland. Indeed, they are so very important to the people of Queensland, and more important to the people of Rockhampton, that more than \$1 million was spent on a plan back in 2001 and culminated in the implementation of the plan in about 2004. I will read briefly from that report. It is an extract from something much larger. With \$1 million we get quite a few pages of rhetoric.

Among its aims, the Berserker Wilderness Community Action Plan states that it will 'implement an ecologically based fire management strategy for the Berserker Wilderness'. The action plan further states—

The Berserker Wilderness Fire Management Strategy provides background information on the Berserker Wilderness and detailed analysis of fire management. Also included are inventories of the flora and fauna of the area. A series of maps illustrated various aspects of the Berserker Wilderness including infrastructure, fire breaks, vegetation communities and fire zones.

In reference to managed burns in fire adapted woodland, the plan further states—

Planned burning programs in cool conditions reduce fuel loads and decrease the opportunity for wildfire to spread across the Berserker Wilderness. Mosaic burning programs carried out at carefully timed intervals are important in maintaining the diversity of plants and animals in fire-adapted vegetation communities.

Those are very telling words. The plan further states—

Typical fire protection measures for the protection of infrastructure include:

- mown or slashed buffer zones;
- slashed and raked firebreaks;
- bare earth firebreaks;
- strategically burnt 'buffer' blocks adjacent to unattended resources;
- seasonal clean-up prior or at commencement of dry weather or fire season.

I could go on for the next 20 minutes and read extracts from that strategy, but I will not. I think members get the idea. A very substantial plan was put in place, costing \$1 million plus I imagine—something in kind from the state government. Last week a wildfire started in that national park. How it came about is speculation that we do not need to go into. The fact of the matter is that quite quickly and clearly it became apparent that the management plan was never acted on. There were no breaks. There was no maintenance of the fire breaks. There was no recognition of the significant heritage of that land. There were minimal cool burns. Today in the House the minister tried to defend that.

The management of that Queensland wilderness area was an absolute disaster. It was a magnificent dry rainforest. I saw what was left. There is white ash on the ground. The fire was so hot that all that is left of that rainforest is white ash on the ground. That shows how hot the fire was. I have been on the land a long time and I know what I am taking about. I can tell the House that that forest will never grow back. Millions of animals would have been killed in that fire. Where are the greenies now? They were not out there saving those animals, and members opposite are laughing about it. There is no doubt that millions of animals would have been lost. Sacred ecosystems have been lost forever. Yet all that has happened is that today in the House the minister tried to criticise me for defending the rural firefighters who had to fight that fire in the backyards of the houses that back onto that wilderness area. That is abysmal.

**Mr MOORHEAD:** I rise to a point of order.

**Mr MALONE:** It is abysmal that a minister would rise in this House and attack me for defending the firefighters who were sent in to try to save those houses.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Ms Johnstone): Order! Just one moment; there is a point of order.

**Mr MOORHEAD:** I rise to a point of order under standing order 236. The member is making comments about the back-burning of forest in a conservation area, which is not dealt with in this bill. I would ask that you remind the member of standing order 236.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I remind the honourable member that the bill before the House is for a particular purpose. If you could please come to your point, that would be appreciated.

**Mr MALONE:** I accept your direction, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was trying to point out the fact that we are talking about the management of rural land and regrowth and how the government maintains the land that it owns. Quite frankly, what I am saying has relevance to this bill because I am looking at how rural landholders look after their land as opposed to how the government looks after its land. My view is that there are questions to be asked about the management of land, whether it be by landholders or the government that looks after the national parks, forests and wilderness areas throughout Queensland. We have to establish some mechanism by which a standard is set for the management of land across Queensland.

I strongly believe we should be protecting absolutely the significant landholdings across Queensland that contain ecologically significant areas. I have no problem with that at all and our shadow minister has no problem with that. However, quite frankly, I do have problems with tying up regrowth land that will never, ever go back to the way it was. I am not sure that anybody understands what I am talking about. Once you clear land—

**Mr Wettenhall:** We're sure we don't understand what you're talking about!

**Mr MALONE:** That is fine; I understand that you do not understand, so we are back to square one. When you clear land, you take out the original vegetation. When it regrows, it grows far thicker and more profusely than before. The land that is available under the regrowth is almost a desert in terms of animal livelihoods or ecosystems. Regrowth will never return the ecosystem that was present before the land was cleared. Let us get that clear. That does not happen in Queensland. It may happen in other states, but it certainly does not happen in Queensland. More importantly, it certainly does not happen in the area that I

come from. The idea that somehow you can lock up endangered regrowth systems and expect the land to go back to what it was before is an absolute furphy. Frankly, anybody who professes that as fact seriously should see a psychologist.

I will not go on at any great length, other than to say that in the area that I come from and in quite a lot of the areas across the rest of the state the management of our national parks and forests is a disgrace. It is about time that the government used as its own benchmark the standards that it is trying to set for rural landholders. It is about time that it took a leaf out of the book of the people who manage this country, that is, the farmers and the graziers, and used their information in the management of its own land. We might be better off.