




Speech by

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MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE

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STRATEGIC CROPPING LAND BILL

 **Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—KAP) (11.45 am): The Strategic Cropping Land Bill seeks to implement the legislative framework that recognises the state's strategic cropping land as a finite resource that must be protected against the impacts of development and preserved for future generations. The bill proposes to use planning and development powers to maintain development impacts. The bill before the House is long overdue and, in the case of the coal seam gas invasion across Central Queensland, is too late. However, I welcome any move to protect land that is essential to our food security. But it does not go far enough. I believe that the horse has already bolted.

It is important not to make the mistake of thinking that this is a purely economic argument. Global food production must increase to be able to feed our growing population both here and globally. It is dangerously short-sighted to think that our salvation is in the resource sector alone when the United Nations is warning that farmers must increase food production by 100 per cent in the next 40 years. We need to protect this \$14 billion industry. We have seen the reduction of the dairy industry because of deregulation, our potato industry wiped out because of the duopoly of Coles and Woolworths. Now we are seeing the growing threat to our food bowl due to mining.

There is a serious question regarding how much the proposed legislation actually protects farmers and how much it intrudes on the land rights of farmers. One has to question the validity of the government's claim that this is about protecting farm land when the Treasurer steps in to fast-track mining development approvals so he is not subject to this legislation. An article in one of our papers stated—

Queensland mining industry plays down farmland development restrictions.

The resource industry says farm groups should keep the cork in their champagne bottles because many mining projects will still go ahead, despite the declaration in Queensland of areas of strategic cropping land.

The State Government says it is moving to protect the most valuable food producing areas by banning activity which would permanently render the land unusable.

Michael Roche from the Queensland Resources Council says that he does not rule out all projects. He says that two important categories of mining projects that fall within the boundary of the strategic cropping lands will be able to proceed. Those are projects which have the terms of reference for their environmental impact statements finalised and some expansion of existing operations. He says that miners may look at underground mining rather than open-cut mining.

Across Queensland farmers who once thought they owned the land they paid for are living in fear. From the black soils of the Darling Downs to the rich volcanic soil of the Atherton Tablelands, farmers watch in apprehension as the maps increasingly resemble a shop front for foreign mining investment. The eligibility criteria for strategic cropping land, as outlined in the regulatory assessment statement, indicate farmers will be charged the same as mining companies to find out if their land is protected.

The \$17,000 that farmers are required to pay just to find out if their land is strategic cropping land is an expense that most will be unable to pay. So there is a sense in the farming community of just waiting until a mining company makes a claim on their land to see if they are protected. Farmers should not have to pay such exorbitant fees to find out if the land they own is protected by the government that collects their taxes.

This has been a pressing issue over the last few years in relation to the expansion of coal seam gas. An article in the *Australian* newspaper yesterday states—

Senate inquiry calls for halt to coal-seam gas projects in Murray-Darling Basin.

THE federal government should impose a moratorium on further coal-seam gas projects in the Murray-Darling food bowl that overlay the great artesian basin, according to a parliamentary inquiry into the social and environmental impact of the controversial industry.

In relation to this controversial issue, all the lobby groups across Queensland are crying out for a moratorium so that we can slow coal seam gas down, so we can get the facts right, so we are able to get the knowledge and get the farmers working with the mining companies. At the same time, we want to protect our Great Artesian Basin. This is why this issue is so important. While I welcome the introduction of legislation that protects strategic cropping land, which is very important, we need to get this right. It is going too fast. Farmers are crying out for support on this one. That is why it is important that a moratorium is put in place so that we get it right. Whoa it up; slow it down. Many interest groups are out there calling for a moratorium. The only groups who are opposing it are the Labor Party and the LNP. It is important that we protect our Great Artesian Basin. We in the Australian Party are committed to prohibiting hydraulic fracking three kilometres in any direction from aquifers, groundwater source or groundwater supply points. We will also prohibit drilling through the Great Artesian Basin, which will protect the Great Artesian Basin.

Mr Lucas interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Elmes): Order! If the Attorney-General wants to take part, he should move to his own seat.

Mr KNUTH: We will also restore property rights. They need to be restored because we have lost property rights. We will promote and support property rights legislation that will restore negotiating powers to landowners. No mining or exploration activity will be permitted on the landowner's property without the landowner's explicit consent, nor will the exploration permits for a mining lease be granted without the landowner's consent. A landowner retains the absolute right to withhold consent. Any consent given must be a written agreement based on the terms that are deemed by the landowner to be fair and reasonable to recognise the landowner's rights. This is far better than this legislation. I wanted to bring this information to the attention of the House.