




Speech By
Hon. David Crisafulli

MEMBER FOR MUNDINGBURRA

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. DF CRISAFULLI** (Mundingburra—LNP) (Minister for Local Government, Community Recovery and Resilience) (4.28 pm): I rise to make a short contribution to the Vegetation Management Framework Amendment Bill 2013. Whilst I am sure the minister will articulately respond to some of the points raised by the member for Bundamba, I also have something to say briefly. On one matter I actually agree with the member for Bundamba. I agree with her when she speaks about the perils of an extreme brown government, because I saw one of those in Canberra—the extreme Gillard-Brown government.

What happens when you allow governments to be hijacked by people with extreme views is that anyone who wants to do anything gets put in a corner and sidelined. Good governments are governments that find the middle road, and that is what this amendment does; it finds the middle road. It is not about pandering to the extreme movements that keep people in power; it is about finding the middle road. To use hysterical terms like ‘extreme brownie’, which we heard time and time again—it seems like something you would buy in a cafe in Amsterdam—smacks of everything that those opposite stand for. They just do not get it. They simply do not understand what this does.

This bill does what we told the people of this state we would do, and that is to grow a four-pillar economy, to double the value of food production by 2040, reduce the burden and the red tape that was strangling everybody in this state. To somehow suggest that this does anything but that is simply false and misleading.

The bill will return the regulation on regrowth vegetation to a similar level that existed before the 2009 changes introduced by the previous government. So do not believe the hysterics, do not believe the nonsense imaging that honourable members are seeing on their television; it is all part of a campaign to push hard left-wing agendas. It is simply not true. It is about finding a balance, and good governments find balance because ultimately people will reward governments that are balanced. I know it might not suit those who have an agenda to lock away preferences, but good governments find a way of striking the middle ground and at times that means that both sides of an argument might think that you could have gone a little bit further, and I think the Deputy Premier made that point very well. But that is what good governments do.

I will now talk briefly about what the changes mean to the sector that I represent, which is local government. Members would know that, under the current planning and assessment systems, councils have to refer to what is called a material change of use when they want to reconfigure a lot. One of the referral agencies, one of the triggers, is the Department of Natural Resources and Mines. Currently that exists if a lot is two hectares or greater and having the trigger point so low has been a great impediment. In many cases the council was frustrated, I am sure the state was frustrated at having to make the assessment and I know the developer was frustrated. It was layer upon layer of this sort of stuff that restricted our ability as a state to get this place going.

You cannot regulate everything without people eventually putting down their pencils and saying, ‘I have had enough.’ That is where we had got to in this state. You cannot regulate people out of existence and then expect the honey train to continue to keep on powering on and the resources to

keep on coming because you get to a point where people simply have had enough. As part of this, the trigger point will be increased from the current two hectares to five. Some would argue that a five-hectare site is still a very small site when you are talking about environmental values, but I know that is a step in the right direction that will be recognised as a balanced approach.

The broader package of vegetation reforms also includes exemptions for community infrastructure, things like government supported transport infrastructure defined under the Transport Infrastructure Act 2004. These exemptions will stop unnecessary delays holding back important infrastructure projects. It will lift the constraints caused by the vegetation management framework that weigh so heavily on the building of infrastructure critical to our local communities and to Queensland. Again, I ask the question: are we a better society for holding up things like community infrastructure? Are we a better state for putting hurdles like this in place? I think honourable members will find the answer is no.

I turn to the area of recovery and resilience, and I have seen what can happen when there is too much red and green tape standing in the way of communities that simply want to pick themselves up off the canvas after they have been flogged by Mother Nature. The introduction of a new purpose for vegetation clearing for necessary environmental purposes—

Mr Johnson interjected.

Mr CRISAFULLI: Spot on, member for Gregory. The introduction of a new purpose for vegetation clearing for necessary environmental purposes will let landholders and local government achieve the outcomes through planned and proactive clearing. It sounds like common sense to me. Necessary environmental clearing will include clearing to rehabilitate vegetation or degraded land, manage land contamination and prepare for natural disasters. Preparing—heaven forbid governments preparing for things, doing things before a crisis; no knights in shining armour! Hooray! Hooray! Living in Queensland, we accept that we will have floods and cyclones, but we need to put our people and our communities first—ahead of the views from the extreme left.

From the perspective of community recovery resilience, these changes present a practical and a cost-effective way to overcome current legislative constraints which have stopped communities in the past from pre-emptively protecting their assets—things like homes, schools and businesses as well as important infrastructure from the natural disasters that we have seen all too much of in recent years. However, this new environmental clearing purpose will not allow indiscriminate clearing. Appropriate controls will be put in place to ensure that any vegetation clearing is only for the specific activities identified—yet again finding the middle road.

I will conclude by briefly discussing the retention of some of the key environmental protections. The reforms introduced in the bill do not allow a return to broadscale land clearing in Queensland, contrary to the nonsense honourable members have seen on their television screen. Nor do the reforms erode existing environmental protections under other legislation which will continue to apply. By that I mean the Commonwealth government's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999—something with which I have had lots of dealings over the years—Queensland's Nature Conservation Act 1992 and the Sustainable Planning Act 2009 in addition to the existing provisions in the Vegetation Management Act 1999. This is not a return to 'anything goes'. This is sensible. This is moderate. This is the sign of a government that strikes a balance.

I conclude by commending the minister for what is something that he is passionate about. There are few members in this House who appreciate agriculture as much as my good friend the member for Hinchinbrook. This means so much to him. He has sat through and watched the changes erode the livelihoods of the people he represents—people like my father, who is a constituent of his and a landowner. This is sensible, it is moderate, it is middle ground and I support the bill wholeheartedly.