




Speech By  
**Deb Frecklington**

**MEMBER FOR NANANGO**

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**VEGETATION MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mrs FRECKLINGTON** (Nanango—LNP) (5.11 pm): I rise today to show my full support for the proposed overhaul of Queensland's vegetation management framework. These changes are much anticipated and long awaited throughout the whole of Queensland but in particular in my electorate of Nanango. These changes are the news that everyone has been waiting to hear since our government was elected last year. I am proud to be part of the Newman government that has helped to restore the balance when it comes to vegetation management.

I congratulate the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines, the Hon. Andrew Cripps, and his staff for bringing these changes before the House. They have brought together some commonsense, practical reforms that will cut red tape and ensure our regional landholders can go about their daily business without being treated like criminals. They will be innocent until proven otherwise. The onus, quite rightly, should be on the government. This is a basic element of law. I would also like to thank the State Development, Infrastructure and Industry Committee, chaired by Mr David Gibson, member for Gympie, for its review of the amendments and note that the committee recommended that the amendments be passed. In my role as Assistant Minister for Regulatory Reform, the Office of Best Practice Regulation has been involved in a review of this legislation and it is pleasing to note that there will be a reduction in red tape.

The Vegetation Management Act was so complex that no-one could understand how the legislation was to be implemented. This amendment bill will make it easier for farmers, those in the agricultural industry and graziers to do business and increase agricultural production. When I travel around the large electorate of Nanango primary producers ask me when the Vegetation Management Act will be changed. Primary production is a major industry within my region. We grow cattle, grains, vegetables, chicken, fruit, pigs, wine, grapes, fodder and much more.

**A government member:** And peanuts.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** And peanuts, absolutely. And navy beans and chickpeas. We could keep going.

**A government member:** Now you are showing off.

**Mrs FRECKLINGTON:** We can show off in the electorate of Nanango because it is the food bowl of Queensland. These farmers play a major role in managing native vegetation for environmental and production outcomes. They have wanted to know when these changes will take place because the overregulation and burden placed on them by the current laws are having a major impact on their business, such as preventing the expansion of some agricultural activities; preventing changes in land use such as grazing to cropping; inhibiting the adoption or the full exploitation of new technologies such as precision agriculture using GPS guidance systems; inhibiting the cost-effective routine management of vegetation regrowth and clearing of woodland thickening to maintain areas in production and also inhibiting the cost-effective management of weeds and vermin.

Some environmental groups believe that these regional landholders just want these changes so they can strip the land. This is simply not true. Research by the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and

Resource Economics and Sciences found that the majority of farmers manage native vegetation for both environmental and production outcomes and many intend to do more to improve the condition and extent of native vegetation. The Labor Party has no idea about land management. They fundamentally do not get it. Regional landholders are indeed a progressive bunch. They realise that looking after their trees and their soil, their native animals and their water is not only commonsense but it also—go figure—improves productivity. Primary producers in my region are members of groups like the Rosalie North Landcare Group, the North East Downs Landcare Group, Kingaroy Landcare Group, Brisbane Valley Kilcoy Landcare Group and the Atkinson Buaraba Creek Catchment Landcare Group. They are members of these groups because these farmers and rural landholders love the land and often are more green than the greenies themselves. They are always seeking new and better ways to manage their land. That is where they want to live and raise their families. They want to leave it in a better condition than when they started. There is nothing more special for a regional landholder than to see a koala as he or she may be riding through their property or spot a rock wallaby or even a glossy black cockatoo.

When the Vegetation Management Act came into force in 1999 all of that changed. All of a sudden their properties were colour coded and their plans to expand and change practices were put on hold. Suddenly every time they wanted to do anything to improve their productivity or management of their land they had to apply for a permit as big brother was watching. The Labor Party did not consult and did not have an idea of the practical application of the bill, but introduced it for cheap political gains. All of a sudden these landholders had mapped properties and areas they had worked for years were off limits. Often—again, go figure—the maps were wrong. For instance, cultivated areas and dams were coloured as regrowth, or areas that had been Tordoned for years were now classified as high-value regrowth. Many of the rules did not make sense and the farmers who had cared for their land and kept large tracts of trees felt they were being punished by no longer being allowed to manage these areas at all.

How would you feel if one day the government of the day just took away one quarter of your business and said you were no longer allowed to use it? There was much confusion about what the categories meant. For example, people living in urban areas might believe remnant means remaining from the days of Captain Cook. However, in many cases all it really meant was that the landholder could not prove it had not been cleared any time in the past. Unfortunately, most of these landholders did not know back in the thirties, forties, fifties, sixties, seventies and even eighties that they should have taken photos to prove that clearing had, in fact, occurred.

This bill proposes that a single regulated vegetation management map will replace the current regional ecosystem maps, the remnant map and the regrowth vegetation map. The regulated vegetation management map will identify assessable and non-assessable vegetation. Our government's aim is to make it easier for clients to understand and apply on the ground. It is envisaged that these maps will be available in 2013.

These reforms are about restoring a balance to Queensland's vegetation management laws, that is, balance for cattle farmers such as John Westaway of Colinton in the northern Somerset. Mr Westaway's family operates two beef properties in my electorate. He provided a submission to the committee in which he stated that he strongly supported the changes proposed. He is the type of landholder who is conscious of the benefits of varying tree densities and, as a result, has allowed regrowth under the protection of his PMAVs. He has always had some concern about the sincerity of governments pledging to honour this policy and has approached this management with caution. He now welcomes these reforms, particularly the removal of the high-value regrowth from freehold and Indigenous land, as he believes it is a reward to landholders, especially those who have retained trees so that they may plan their property management with much-needed confidence and certainty and retain vegetation without fear of being unable to harvest in the future. He also stated that among his main issues were the incorrect nature of the maps, overadministration of vegetation management and overregulation of activities.

Ray Patroni lives in the northern part of my electorate. He says that the changes to the laws will give him greater certainty when he needs to make a vegetation management decision. Rather than being worried each time that he may not be allowed to cut down a tree or clear an area, he can act with confidence that he has made the decision and knows that it is right for his property, because Ray is a regional landholder who cares for his land and manages his property well. He knows that trees are an important part of his property and he values them.

It would be remiss of me to stand in this House and not mention Alan Crawford, who has a property at Gordonbrook. He came to see me about his run-in with the Vegetation Management Act. Mr Crawford was taken to court and fined for clearing. He has been managing his vegetation since the 1960s and believes he has the greenest, thickest trees in Queensland. He cleared trees on his property which had previously been cleared prior to 1963 but, unfortunately, was rezoned as remnant

vegetation. He has suffered hugely, not only from the significant impost but also he says that during the two years that it took to go through the courts he lacked sleep and it has taken 10 years off his life.

That is what our change is about. The Labor government did not understand what it did to regional landholders and did not understand that the regions are an important part of Queensland. I commend this bill to the House.