




Speech By
Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—KAP) (8.32 pm): In speaking to the Vegetation Management Framework Amendment Bill, I support this bill. It has merit and this bill is long overdue. I was in the House when the Vegetation Management Act 2004 was debated for almost three days clause by clause. Being a witness to that and seeing lives destroyed and impediments that have been put on landowners year in and year out with changes to legislation, tree clearing laws and an election that was based on a preference deal with the Greens which saw over one million hectares of land locked up during that period, it is time that all of those impediments that have been placed on landowners are wound back. Therefore, it is great to see this legislation. At that time with that vegetation management legislation we saw the spy in the sky satellites, the dob in the farmer hotlines, the tree police, the water police and everything else that went with it to the point where landowners were guilty before proven innocent. It is good to see that the minister has addressed that and turned that around in that you are innocent until proven guilty.

The reality is that these landowners are primary producers. They are farmers. They put good food on the table such as fruit and vegetables. They are competing against overseas markets that do not have any workplace health and safety standards and that do not abide by the appropriate regulations that are placed on farmers and landowners here. As a result, in this day and age many landowners are struggling to survive. It is the same with the live export industry. That is an industry that has been worked on for many years in order to establish those markets but was destroyed within one day and now over 500,000 head of cattle are dying as a result of foolish decisions by the federal government, which is worried about a small number of animal health issues and malpractice in one or two abattoirs. As a result, we are now seeing 500,000 cattle that will virtually die and be eaten by dingos and crows. It is just a disgrace to see that an industry can suffer and lives can be ruined in that people have to be forced financially to try to make ends meet and make those payments to the bank and try to survive by whatever means they can while at the same time they are hit with the tree police, the water police, the spy in the sky satellites, the dob in a farmer hotlines.

Another difficult issue is that vegetation regrowth just keeps growing and growing. Farmers are trying to keep land productive while there are hectares and hectares of thick regrowth coming through and they are doing their very best to keep their area clean. Travelling through electorates like Hinchinbrook and Callide you see the beautiful farmlands. That is an end product. They are portrayed as landowners knocking over trees, but they never show the end product. They never show the sorghum and the legumes and the fatness of the cattle. They never show the people in the cities eating that good, fat rump steak with pepper sauce, chips and vegetables. They never show that, but they are happy to show the bulldozers. They are happy to show the trees being knocked down, but they do not show those people who are campaigning, arguing and fighting to stop them from developing their land. They do not show that. They do not show the person who is eating that nice steak; they show the person who is smashing down trees.

This bill also gives the opportunity for landowners to clean the waterways, because it is a big issue. If we want to see clean rivers, we have to give landowners the opportunity to clean those

waterways without the threat of jail sentences. I acknowledge that this bill does not allow the cleaning of remnant vegetation on riverine areas, but it allows the opportunity for landowners to clean those river systems without these threats. This is good legislation.

With regard to leasehold land, there are issues that can be addressed and I will give the House an example relating to the clearing of leasehold land. I can name a number of cases where people took up leasehold blocks in the belief that they were able to develop those blocks. There is one particular block that I want to mention where the whole block is full of wattle and lancewood. The moment you knock that over, it grows again. If you had the opportunity to develop that area, plough it, sow a good seed and grow Rhodes grass, it is a possibility to make that land productive. This particular person bought that block and then the vegetation laws came in. That whole block is now locked up. It is 13,000 acres. This bloke is now working in the mines and that property has been run into the ground because there is nothing much he can do in that it is leasehold land and there is no opportunity to develop it. I believe that somewhere along the line we have to find a way of offsetting these leaseholders. Seventy per cent of Queensland is leasehold land. I believe that this issue needs to be assessed on a case-by-case basis. I understand that the minister does not want to rush into this, but that is something to look into.

The bill also removes high-value regrowth regulations from freehold and Indigenous land. That was another impediment that was forced upon us. Basically, freehold land was about the right to manage your land. Riverine protection has always been in place. I have never supported and will never support the clearing of remnant vegetation in river systems. I believe it is very important to protect that remnant vegetation. But at the same time your freehold land was yours. You paid a price for that land. It was a significant price but you paid that extra price because you believed that you were able to manage that land without the impediments imposed upon you.

I want to reiterate that I believe that farmers should not be portrayed as criminals. We should regard our farmers and our primary industries very highly. We should put them on a pedestal for the work that they do, the contribution that they make to Queensland, the gross revenue that they produce and the jobs that they create. It is very extreme to portray our farmers as smashing down all the trees, killing koalas, destroying the habitat of the mahogany glider and the rainforest with the cassowary and all of that.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr KNUTH: Yes, sorry about the offence. I like the cassowary. I think the portrayal of farmers is overdone. We need to look at the end product, what primary producers are trying to achieve and to acknowledge that 25 years ago they received a greater return. We need to look desperately at why they were getting a better return 25 years ago. Twenty-five years ago, the rural sector was about jobs, it was about supporting communities, it was about keeping communities alive. It was about ensuring that schools were full in those small regional towns as they were the soul and the backbone. If you remove the rural sector, you remove a township, you remove a school, you remove the economy and people move to the coast, which puts greater stress on those areas.

(Time expired)