



Speech By
Hon. Cameron Dick

MEMBER FOR WOODRIDGE

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**VEGETATION MANAGEMENT (REINSTATEMENT) AND OTHER LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Hon. CR DICK** (Woodridge—ALP) (Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services) (9.48 pm): I rise tonight to speak in support of the Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016. I strongly support this bill because it makes sense on so many levels. Other speakers have spoken of the positive environmental aspects of the bill and I acknowledge those thoughtful contributions.

I want to emphasise that this bill makes good economic sense in the long term. The bill fairly balances, in my view, the interests of the agricultural sector and the tourism sector. For too long the debate about land clearing in Queensland has taken place in the context of agriculture versus tourism and other sectors of the Queensland economy and conflict between city and country—between those who live on the coast and those who live in the bush. Many members of the LNP opposite have promoted this adversarial culture, yet what this bill seeks to do is to find the right balance. It is not a radical change. It is about sensible change. Let me take the tourism industry first.

The Great Barrier Reef is the jewel in Queensland's tourism crown. Land clearing in North Queensland and Cape York puts at risk the integrity of the Great Barrier Reef. All Queenslanders know that the Great Barrier Reef is one of the natural wonders of the world. In reflecting on the natural beauty and environmental uniqueness of the reef, the economic impact of the reef can be overlooked.

A 2013 study undertaken by Deloitte Access Economics on behalf of the federal Department of the Environment and Energy measured the tourism, recreational, commercial fishing and scientific research and management activity within the reef catchment and World Heritage area. This study found that the value added economic contribution of the reef to the Australian economy in 2011-12 was \$5.68 billion. It also found that the reef generated 69,000 jobs, of which the vast majority were in tourism. That is jobs on Hamilton Island in visitor accommodation, hospitality and entertainment; jobs on Heron Island running educational tours to give visitors a scientific account of the sea life found in the waters of the reef; jobs at Airlie Beach booking day trips for tourists to explore the reef. I cite these figures to make the point that the reef is a significant economic asset, and maintaining its integrity is vital to the future prosperity of our state. More land clearing will lead inexorably to more agricultural run-off, and that is what places the reef at risk.

The reef remains in danger and is the subject of considerable international attention. If this bill is not passed, that failure will be noticed around the world. Indeed, the commitment to reduce land clearing in the reef catchment area was a critical component in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's decision not to list the Great Barrier Reef as endangered. Even members of the LNP must realise the devastating effect a formal UN declaration that the reef has or might be degraded would have on our state's tourism sector.

I now turn to agriculture. Queensland farmers are amongst the smartest and most innovative in the world. For the overwhelming majority of them, farming is about sustainability, about treating the land correctly and with respect so that it provides the best return over many years. Queensland farmers are undertaking measures such as using semi-permeable membranes in their irrigation pipes so that salt and other impurities are removed from the water, a measure which allows them to use salty water when irrigating crops. They are also using drones, which allow for the remote monitoring of fences, stock and dam levels. One particular innovation uses drones to spread predatory insects over cropping land so they can kill pests that would otherwise destroy crops. This is modern thinking which applies new technology to one of our oldest industries.

This bill does not ban land clearing completely. What it will do is encourage farmers and others to think of other solutions, because the simple solution of clearing more land to allow for more agriculture is the sort of solution that many Queensland farmers left behind a long time ago. Let us not forget that for many years the greatest clearer of land in rural Queensland was none other than the former Country Party and National Party premier Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, a man whose whole style of government is one which modern Queensland has left well and truly behind. Likewise, land clearing as a simple solution to agricultural issues is one that has been left well and truly behind by many.

The cries of those opposite that agriculture will be badly affected are just not supported by facts. Consider this: in 2005-06, the year before bans on broadscale clearing of mature forest was introduced by the Beattie government, the value of Queensland's agricultural sector was \$8.7 billion. The next year, 2006-07, the first year of the ban, the value of Queensland's agricultural sector went up by nine per cent to \$9.5 billion. This grew steadily to over \$10 billion in the final year of the Labor government. Then, when those opposite reached back in time during the Newman-Nicholls LNP government and allowed land clearing to increase substantially, the growth was considerably more modest. In the first year after the LNP changed the rules on land clearing, the value of Queensland's agricultural sector increased by only three per cent and in the second year by only one per cent.

Many Queensland farmers realise that broadscale land clearing is not a sustainable practice and, at some stage, it must stop. Queensland's agricultural sector is one that is largely based on exports. Increasingly, consumers, especially those overseas, are demanding that their food be produced in a sustainable fashion. Australia's reputation as a supplier of clean, fresh, world-class agricultural products produced in environmentally sustainable ways is vital to Queensland's international brand and adds value to our exports. I urge those arguing against the bill to go back to the first rule of marketing and of business: ask the customer.

This is a bill which supports the sustainable development of two of our major industries—agriculture and tourism. I thank and commend the Deputy Premier and also the Minister for State Development and Minister for Natural Resources and Mines for the significant work they have done to bring this important legislative measure to the floor of the House. This bill tries to move Queensland on from the adversarial approach promoted by many of those members opposite, an approach based on perspectives, and prejudices in some cases, of the last century. This is a bill which looks forward to Queensland's future and not to its past. I commend the bill to the House.