




Speech By  
**Hon. Grace Grace**

**MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL**

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

 **Hon. G GRACE** (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations, Minister for Racing and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (4.37 pm): I rise to speak in support of the government's Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 and congratulate the Deputy Premier and the Palaszczuk government for bringing this bill forward for debate. This bill is vital to protect Queensland's greatest natural asset, the Great Barrier Reef, to tackle climate change, to stop the destruction of our precious old growth forests, to prevent soil erosion and to improve reef water quality. I could not think of better reasons that this bill should be passed.

This bill delivers on a key election commitment—let me say that again, a key election commitment; I campaigned very heavily on this issue in my electorate—to reinstate the vegetation management laws that were repealed by the Newman government in 2013. Let every member in this House be very clear: it was a big issue in my electorate at the last election. The bill also reintroduces riverine protection permits to guard against excessive clearing of riparian vegetation.

I want to quote a couple of people. Firstly Robert Krulwich, who writes—

If our future is to continuously degrade our planet, lose plant after plant, animal after animal, forgetting what we once enjoyed, adjusting to lesser circumstances, never shouting, "That's It!"—always making do,

I do not think that that is much of a future. That is exactly the situation that the previous government's laws were going to put us in. I also quote Jared Diamond, who wrote the bestselling book *Collapse*. He talks about Easter Island being the clearest example of a society that destroyed itself, committing what he terms ecocide by clearing all trees until the whole forest was gone. He warns that Easter Island's fate could one day be our own. How much have we not learnt in regard to the practices of the past?

Let us not forget what the LNP's changes to vegetation management laws did. They allowed broadscale clearing for high-value and irrigated high-value agricultural development. An increase of an incredible amount of hectares of tree clearing happened during their time.

**An honourable member:** How many?

**Ms GRACE:** 300,000 hectares.

**Honourable members** interjected.

**Ms GRACE:** A year!

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Millar): Order! Members, I would like to hear the minister speak. Thank you.

**Ms GRACE:** They removed high-value regrowth vegetation clearing protections on freehold and Indigenous land and removed compliance and evidentiary provisions that were inconsistent with fundamental legislative principles. These changes have taken their toll on Queensland's environment

which is why urgent action is required. Importantly, our proposed measures also support the joint state and Commonwealth government Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan. Protecting the reef should be beyond politics, yet hardly any speeches that we have heard in this House talk about the reef. All those opposite talk about are different rights; not one of them mentions the reef. We can rely on the member for Moggill to espouse every rhetoric in the book when he gets up to speak. Those opposite are willing to risk the health of this spectacular marine paradise. Sadly, the environment always comes last under the LNP.

Make no mistake, without the passage of this important legislation the Great Barrier Reef is at risk of being listed as in danger by UNESCO. That is what we are leaving our kids and our kids' kids. It is a disgrace. It is a completely unacceptable outcome for all Queenslanders to put our environmental heritage at risk, along with thousands of tourism jobs. Such an outcome would also pose unacceptable risks to regional economies that rely on reef tourism.

I want to address one of the major misconceptions being promulgated by those opposite about this bill. The suggestion that the bill goes far above and beyond previous legislative restrictions on land clearing could not be further from the truth. In fact, the proposed reforms will reinstate generally the same regulations that were in place prior to the LNP's reckless changes in 2013 after they said there would not be any. Back in 2004 these regulations were supported by the member for Caloundra, the member for Currumbin and the member for Surfers Paradise. In fact, the member for Surfers Paradise was particularly glowing in his praise for the Beattie government's vegetation management legislation which subsequently became law until it was repealed by those opposite. Speaking of the proposed laws in this chamber back in April 2004 the member for Surfers Paradise said—

This is a policy that ensures the sustainability of the environment. In doing so, the sustainability of industry is also assured and western Queensland industrial centres can continue to function. Lack of support for this bill would not strike that same balance. While industry would thrive even more so, the benefit to industry would be disproportionate compared with the detriment to the environment.

The member for Surfers Paradise then went on to boast about the then Queensland Liberal Party being a party that looks at the big picture. Haven't things changed! The very same members, once fulsome in their praise of strong vegetation management legislation, now cynically oppose our sensible and workable reforms, reforms Queenslanders voted for at the state election. I call that hypocrisy. I also want to make it clear that our bill does not impose a blanket ban on land clearing in Queensland. The self-assessable codes will be retained which will still allow clearing to occur for a range of purposes, including managing fodder, thinning of thickened regrowth vegetation and control of weeds and pests. All this doom and gloom that is painted by those opposite could not be further from the truth. They are exaggerating what this bill will do. When they come into this House, they do not believe the science and they do not rely on facts—it is all doom and gloom.

Our proposed reforms have strong support from key environmental stakeholders, including Dr Tim Seelig from the Queensland Conservation Council. Dr Seelig has written to me expressing the council's support for the Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. He says the land-clearing legislation represents 'a sensible, moderate approach to regulating the clearing of native woodlands in Queensland'. He also notes that previous times of stronger laws have seen better times for farm jobs and recent times of weaker laws have seen poorer agricultural employment. This is despite the job scare campaign being run on this issue by those opposite. I have seen them running around the state causing hysteria, exaggerating the issue, trying to rally the troops based on nothing more than false pretences and not concentrating on the facts. This is in contrast to the rapid rise in clearing rates Queensland witnessed as a result of changes to the Vegetation Management Act made by the LNP.

This bill is about the long-term health of Queensland's environment. It is about the future and about what we pass on to the next generation of Queenslanders. The bill gives us a chance to right the wrongs of the past and to build a brighter future for all Queenslanders. In addition to reducing run-off of pollutants and sediments into watercourses which flow into the Great Barrier Reef, our bill will also provide benefits for biodiversity and carbon emissions. These are the outcomes Queenslanders voted for at the state election. They expect their elected representatives to deliver them. Let me tell members a secret: every Queenslander wants to protect the Great Barrier Reef. Not one of them wants to see anything that will harm the jewel in the crown of this state. I urge all members to think about the future of the reef, to think about the future of our climate and, most importantly of all, to think about the future of their children when they vote on this bill. I am very proud to support this bill. I commend the bill to the House and I urge everyone to do likewise.