Speech By

Hon. Leeanne Enoch

MEMBER FOR ALGESTER

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT (REINSTATEMENT) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Hon. LM ENOCH (Algester—ALP) (Minister for Innovation, Science and the Digital Economy and Minister for Small Business) (4.22 pm): I rise to support the Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. Labor went to the last election with a commitment to reinstate a responsible vegetation management framework. I am pleased that my Department of Science, Information Technology and Innovation, DSITI, is supporting the delivery of that commitment by providing the best available science. Our government is having to take this course of action because of the LNP's irresponsible, reckless and destructive approach to climate change and land clearing. It was the former LNP government that wound back Labor's nation-leading vegetation management laws. Under the watch of those opposite, land-clearing rates doubled and those responsible for this outcome should be ashamed of the negative impact on our state's environment that resulted.

The Statewide Landcover and Trees Study, SLATS, report for 2014-15 was recently published by DSITI and it shows that our state's reputation for land management continues to be seriously damaged by the actions of the former LNP government. Using Landsat satellite imagery, the report shows that total annual woody vegetation clearing rates are similar to the previous years at 296,000 hectares per year, with 91 per cent of the cleared land converted to pasture. While much of this clearing was undertaken under permit and exemption, the overall clearing rate continues to be high and incidents of unexplained clearing are still occurring. Just to illustrate how high the clearing rate is, the 2014-15 woody vegetation clearing rate is nearly four times the 2009-10 clearing rate of 78,378 hectares. In comparison, the New South Wales woody vegetation rates measured with SPOT satellite imagery show 23,000 hectares had been cleared of woody vegetation for pasture, crops and thinning over the three years to June 2013. I know that the way these figures are collected differ between our states, but it demonstrates the scale of clearing in Queensland by comparison. What is also alarming is that about one-third of clearing in Queensland occurred in Great Barrier Reef catchments—about 108,000 hectares in 2014-15. That is an increase of 46 per cent since 2011-12.

A further concern outlined in the report is the increased rate of the clearing of remnant woody vegetation, with an additional 14,000 hectares per year cleared as compared to the 2013-14 study period. The implications of all of this are far reaching. They include loss of native species, including threatened species, as well as contributing to higher greenhouse gas emissions and increased risk to land condition in reef catchments. As well as monitoring woody vegetation clearing, the department's vegetation and remote-sensing scientists have been working collaboratively with the Department of Natural Resources and Mines to improve the accuracy of mapping used in vegetation management. Mapping is central to the efficient application of Queensland's vegetation management framework. DSITI supports vegetation management mapping through its existing programs for regional ecosystem and wetland mapping, as well as data and advice underpinning the protection of essential habitats for threatened species. More recently, DNRM has utilised DSITI's mapping expertise to improve the

accuracy of mapping for proposed category C areas on freehold and Indigenous tenures, removing areas that do not contain high-value regrowth.

Self-assessable codes can enable efficient vegetation management regulation. However, an independent review of Queensland's codes undertaken in 2015 by environmental consultants Cardo Pty Ltd identified some significant issues. DSITI scientists have been assisting DNRM in its review of the self-assessable codes to ensure that they are consistent with current science and with the purpose of the Vegetation Management Act 1999. Further, the department's scientists have been collaborating with their colleagues in DNRM by providing scientific information to support briefings to the parliamentary Agriculture and Environment Committee; developing and operationalising a new satellite based early detection system to proactively detect and reduce unexplained land clearing; extending and refining the classification and mapping of Queensland's regional ecosystems which are a foundation for our environmental management and regulation across the state; and providing technology to deliver maps and supporting information online, including property specific vegetation management maps delivered to thousands of Queenslanders per month. As a government we rely on these scientific activities to provide evidence that helps to inform sound policy decisions.

Labor recognised in 1999 that tree-clearing rates in Queensland were unacceptable, so we took action that produced real results. We are once again trying to take action on this issue on behalf of all Queenslanders, not just for today but of course for generations ahead because that is what Labor governments do. I put on record my sincere gratitude to the incredible scientists that we have in DSITI, across the state government and across our state. We have some incredible scientists who have dedicated their lives to ensuring that good science informs good policy. I put on record my absolute gratitude for their long hours and hard work. I commend the bill to the House.