




Speech By  
**Hon. Mark Bailey**

**MEMBER FOR YEERONGPILLY**

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Record of Proceedings, 17 March 2016

**VEGETATION MANAGEMENT (REINSTATEMENT) AND OTHER LEGISLATION  
AMENDMENT BILL, REPORTING DATE**

 **Hon. MC BAILEY** (Yeerongpilly—ALP) (Minister for Main Roads, Road Safety and Ports and Minister for Energy, Biofuels and Water Supply) (9.39 pm): We have no economy without the protection of our environment. I rise to speak against the amendment and in support of the motion moved by the Deputy Premier. This is a very well-canvassed issue. Perhaps there are few issues debated in this state that have been more canvassed than this one, given the last 16 to 17 years of public debate about tree clearing and vegetation management laws. Stakeholders are very clear about their position. They are very clear about their knowledge of this matter and they are very clear about their vested interests. None of those groups, whether they be on the environment side or on other aspects of this debate, has an absence of a position on this matter.

Let us put to bed well and truly this supposition that we need a lot more time on this matter. People know their positions on this matter. That has been very clear in the public debate and in this House. A one-month time frame is adequate and normal for this to occur. It will give stakeholders adequate opportunity to submit.

The opposition are not actually in favour of more consultation. They opposed this bill at the first reading—the first time in this parliament's history, I understand—so there could be no consultation whatsoever. Now we have this amendment which says, 'We actually want more time.' The contradiction in their position is pretty obvious to anybody watching this debate. What they really want to do is stall, delay, diffuse and confuse. If members had any doubt that the opposition's position on this is to cause maximum confusion, they only had to listen to the contributions of the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Mermaid Beach. They were not really talking in facts; they were talking from an ideological position. They took an ideological position, as opposed to the evidence and science based position the government is putting forward that is reasonable and pro economy.

I can tell members that the 70,000 jobs that rely on the Great Barrier Reef are under threat from attacks on the reef. Sediment run-off is documented. There is an evidence and science base that sediment run-off is one of the greatest threats to the Great Barrier Reef. This government is moving to act on that. We are putting forward sustainable, evidence based policy that is actually pro economy as well as pro environment. Let us not accept this 20th century argument that we have to choose between the economy and the environment. They are one and the same. We want to protect those jobs on the reef and in regional Queensland in a sustainable way. That is what this bill does. The motion does allow for adequate consultation with stakeholders. They will have ample opportunity to let us know their views.

I also oppose the amendment on the basis that this government went to the people with our very clear position on tree clearing—that is, we would reinstate legislation. That is what we said to the people. We have formed government and we are getting on with the job of doing exactly what we said to the people of Queensland we would do. I contrast that to the opposition, who won the 2012 election saying

the exact opposite. They tried to fool the people of Queensland that they would not do anything about tree clearing. They said it twice leading into the 2012 election. It is just like uranium. They said they had no plans when it comes to uranium. They fooled the people of Queensland. That is why they are in opposition after only one term in government. They did not have faith in the people of Queensland. They did not share with them their real position on a range of matters including this. They paid the price at the last election, when the people of Queensland caught up with them.

Another very clear and obvious reason this amendment should be voted down and the motion should be passed is that there is a very real risk of panic clearing in our state. That is a real prospect and a real risk in terms of our environment and our economy. Another good reason to not have an elongated consultation process is that we do not want that sort of environmental outcome in our state.

I note the contributions from opposition members on this point. I note that a range of words were not even mentioned—for example, 'emissions'. I do not think I heard the word 'emissions' once from a single opposition speaker. I did not hear much about protecting the Great Barrier Reef. That seems to have been forgotten. I did not hear anything from the opposition about acting on climate change. That is 20th century thinking from the LNP. I invite those opposite to join us in the 21st century. It is a very good place to be.

Vegetation management legislation is not about attacking farmers or siding with any particular groups; it is about driving policy based on science and evidence. That is what a responsible government does. That is what responsible governments do, not just here but also around the world, in response to the evidence around climate change. You can either accept that evidence or not. Clearly the opposition does not accept it.

**Mr WATTS:** Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I have been listening carefully to the minister and I do not believe he is debating the motion before the House. He is debating climate change at the moment.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Thank you very much, member for Toowoomba North. As I indicated when you raised a similar matter earlier, I gave similar latitude to the Leader of the Opposition when he was debating the amendment. I propose to apply the same principles to the minister.

**Mr BAILEY:** The Palaszczuk government accepts the science that proves that unsustainable rates of tree clearing are damaging Queensland's environment, our climate and ultimately our economy. Historically, Queensland's agricultural industry continued to grow under Labor's tree-clearing laws throughout the 2000s. That is a fact. It was Labor's vegetation management laws that gave flexibility to landholders suffering from drought. When broadscale clearing stopped at the end of 2006, the then Labor government did not abandon landholders. It was a Labor government that funded the \$150 million landholder assistance package that provided significant financial incentives for landholders to transition their businesses away from reliance on clearing.

More recently, the Statewide Landcover and Trees Study 2012-14 showed that the annual rate of clearing increased from 153,000 hectares before the LNP was elected in 2012 to a new level where almost 300,000 hectares are now being cleared every year. That is an area more than twice the size of Brisbane or 10 times the size of the city of Rockhampton. I saw the opposition trying to downplay the impact. That is a pretty substantial and graphic comparison—every year.

Labor's vegetation management laws have always had a solid foundation based on science. The rest of Australia is envious of our mapping and science that underpins these best practice laws. The Queensland Herbarium developed the regional ecosystem framework to ensure vegetation management policy is based on real-time and accurate ecological mapping and data—evidence. The LNP did not consider any of this science when it weakened the laws when in government. Why should it? The science was never going to support its plan to reintroduce broadscale clearing and degrade reef catchments and contribute to climate change through increased carbon emissions. Even after the LNP's severe job cuts, the good news is that our government's scientists kept plugging away to keep the science and the mapping current. I congratulate them for doing so and for their tenacity. Labor is now committed to reconnecting our laws to this science, ensuring protection of biodiversity, climate and the reef.

It is a fact that Queensland is responsible for 90 per cent of Australia's total land sector emissions. That is an absolutely scary statistic. Any government in Queensland worth its salt would consider that and act on that. That is what the Palaszczuk government is doing here today. In all other jurisdictions in this nation except Western Australia and the Northern Territory this sector acts as a carbon sink, but in Queensland land clearing is releasing more stored carbon into the planet's atmosphere than at any time in the past eight years—almost 36 million tonnes each year. We have a very proud record of acting in this regard. That we got to a record low in 2009—53,000 hectares—was a proud achievement in this state. I might add: it did not obstruct our economic viability whatsoever.

I note that this bill broadens the protection of regrowth vegetation in watercourse areas, known as category R areas, to the Burnett-Mary, Eastern Cape York and Fitzroy catchments, thereby affording vegetation in all six Great Barrier Reef catchments the same protection. We are serious about protecting the Great Barrier Reef. That is what we said to Queenslanders at the election. We had a plan to do so. We took it to the people. We trusted the people with our policy. That is what a courageous political party does: it shares its policy, it develops its good policy, it engages with the people. Contrast that to the shameful record of the LNP when, in 2012, it deceived the people of Queensland by saying that it would not change the tree-clearing laws.

I also support the removal of the reversal of the onus of proof provisions and the mistake of fact defence for vegetation clearing offences, which were put in by the previous government. It would be highly unusual that that clearing would be made by mistake, given the very nature that it is happening in remote areas and on private property.

This policy is responsible, sustainable, science based policy. The only thing that is a fool's paradise in this place is to ignore the science, is to ignore the evidence, is to ignore the threats to the reef, is to ignore the connection of protecting our environment with our economic viability. That is a fool's paradise. It is 20th century thinking compared to the 21st century thinking of this government.

This bill is not about some alleged green credibility or some self-interest; it is about science and evidence. I look forward to the point in the future, whenever that might be—it might be a while—when the LNP members realise finally what good policy is in terms of climate change and they genuinely accept that we have to act on climate change. Clearly, by their position on this bill, they are showing themselves as being archaic opponents of acting on climate change. That is why they are in opposition. I can assure members that the people of Queensland expect governments to act to protect the environment. That is a modern given and any government that ignores that will pay the price, as the previous Newman government did.

The Leader of the Opposition said that this bill is somehow an attack on property rights. We heard the amazing proposition that somehow we are being like China, North Korea and Russia. It is usual for the state to regulate land use. Whether people buy a house, whether they run a business, or whether they purchase a building, the state regulates behaviour in all sorts of ways. People cannot just walk in and do whatever they want. They have to conform with zonings, they have to deal with councils. It is usual for the government to regulate property and its use. This is usual Western capitalist policy. For the Leader of the Opposition to be comparing us with China, North Korea and Russia is quite bizarre, I would have to say.

**Ms Trad:** Not emotional at all.

**Mr BAILEY:** Indeed. I will take that interjection from the Deputy Premier. I am sure former premier Bjelke-Petersen would have been proud to hear that. It took me back to my childhood.

This is solid policy from the government. We are acting in conformity with our mandate. We are acting in response to science and evidence. This is policy that Queenslanders want. It is not an attack on farmers, or the agricultural sector. We will work with that sector. This does not stop tree clearing, but it regulates it in a more sustainable way that will help protect jobs in this state. We will work with the agricultural sector and with farmers on this matter. The proposition that this is somehow an attack is a very self-interested position that is designed to confuse the electorate rather than engage with them fully.

I absolutely oppose the amendment and support the motion. I am proud that this government is acting on vegetation management and tree clearing in this state. It is a core Labor value. Our record is proud on this matter and it continues to be proud. We will continue to put forward good policy that not only protects our environment but also our economy.