




Speech By  
**Peter Russo**

**MEMBER FOR SUNNYBANK**

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

 **Mr RUSSO** (Sunnybank—ALP) (8.49 pm): I rise to speak in support of this incredibly important piece of legislation that will address the environmental travesty that is unchecked clearing of native vegetation. The Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill will fulfil an election commitment to restore Queensland's nation-leading legislative regulations on widescale deforestation.

Queensland Labor has an incredible legacy of protecting our forest vegetation. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, our native woodlands were being cleared at a phenomenal rate—up to 350,000 hectares per year. The first intervention came from the Goss Labor government in 1995. They had recognised that the consistent widescale clearing was unsustainable and was in most cases not translating into viable agricultural land. Alarmed at the waste and the sheer scale of the clearing, the Goss government moved to control broadscale clearing on leasehold land.

By the late 1990s it was clear that these regulations were not enough to significantly curb the rate of clearing. During the 1998 state election the Beattie government campaigned on a policy to extend the regulations to freehold land and to close loopholes in the existing legislation. Laws to this effect were introduced after the election, but loopholes continued to be exploited. The Beattie government imposed a moratorium on all clearing applications in 2003 to identify the weakness in the legal framework.

The next round of legislation, introduced in 2006, succeeded in phasing out the broadscale clearing of old growth forest and woodland. By 2009 the rate of clearing of native vegetation had dropped from the alarming 300,000 hectares per year in the early 1990s to around 50,000. The reforms ensured that only land that was guaranteed to be viable agricultural land could be cleared and crosschecked this requirement against the environmental protections for endangered and native species including koalas.

Thanks to this ambitious legislative agenda, championed by the Beattie-Bligh government, thousands—potentially millions—of hectares of native Queensland bushland had been saved. The effect that these changes had on reducing our state's net carbon emissions was also remarkable. Land clearing generates up to 36 million tonnes of carbon emissions annually, and Queensland is responsible for more land clearing per year than any other state. Ninety per cent of Australia's emissions from land use come from Queensland. The 2006 reforms allowed Australia to meet our Kyoto Protocol target by reducing emissions by 20 to 25 million tonnes annually.

The Beattie-Bligh government's long-term commitment to ending widescale land clearing is rightly considered to be among the greatest environmental achievements in Australian history. Of course, the reason for digging up this history in 2016 is because of the regressive changes made by

the previous LNP state government. After their election in 2012 the other side wasted no time in broadcasting to the people of Queensland that unsustainable deforestation was back on the agenda. All investigations and prosecutions regarding illegal clearing were frozen in early 2012, and the legislative framework was weakened significantly by the laws passed in 2013. The amendments made broadscale land clearing permissible for agricultural use, reduced offset requirements and removed the existing protections for Indigenous land and high-value regrowth.

Aside from the significant loss of old-growth woodland and entire native ecosystems, the Newman government's changes have also resulted in massive increases in our carbon emissions. In 2013 Queensland was responsible for a third of Australia's total emissions—a disgraceful level for the nation's third most populous state. The Labor opposition opposed these changes every step of the way, and we campaigned strongly on a promise to restore sustainable land use measures in 2015.

The amendments proposed by the Deputy Premier in this bill go a long way towards undoing the damage caused by the LNP. We propose to reinstate protections for high-value regrowth on freehold and Indigenous lands. As the Deputy Premier said back in March, this regrowth has had 25 years to mature to the point that it can contribute meaningfully to our state's vibrant biodiversity. The bill will also reinstate environmental offset requirements on clearing that is permitted. This will ensure that our carbon emissions do not peak as they did under the last administration.

The Goss, Beattie, Bligh and now Palaszczuk governments have all shown nation-leading initiative in this area. I implore all members of this parliament to vote in favour of this bill.