




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MOUNT ISA

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

 **Mr KATTER** (Mount Isa—KAP) (10.26 pm): I rise to support the amendment moved by the member for Mermaid Beach. The basis of my contribution will be timing and fairness. Fairness is a very important word to apply in this debate. Stakeholders and people with a connection to the land should have a primary say because they are the ones most affected by this legislation.

It is going to be very difficult for me to get around 570,000 square kilometres to try to engage with people and let them know that this is an issue that will affect them in the future and encourage them if they are motivated enough to make a contribution. I am going to have to get across the issue and explain it to them. That is a ridiculous amount of time to achieve that in an area like mine. I am sure it would be a very similar situation for other rural MPs in this House.

It is important to make the point in this context that it is perhaps a lot easier for someone who resides in an urban area like Brisbane to quickly have a glance at the science and some photographs and say, 'That is great. That makes me feel warm and fuzzy.' They can form an opinion on that.

In the areas most affected by this there are not many votes. Typically, they are not as in touch with the day-to-day operations of parliament or other matters. Timing becomes a vital point in this whole debate. I think that is an important aspect when it comes to fairness.

If I were dragged into a debate on a tree-clearing policy that affected Paddington residents in Brisbane, I would require a lot more time to consider the issue because I would not understand a lot of the issues that a person in the city would find important. It would take me a long time to get across those issues. Someone in Paddington who is going to make a decision that will have a big impact on my electorate should have adequate time to properly educate themselves and understand the impact their decision will have on an area like mine. It can be big and long term. Putting this legislation through in a short time does not pass the fairness test.

I would like to focus a little on the north obviously by virtue of the fact that that is the area I represent. It represents an area of a lot of development. A lot of these people are not really tuned into tree clearing as much as they otherwise would be, because most of that area is not touched. If we completely deregulated tree clearing, we would at best see some pin prick spots on the map of these gigantic pastoral holdings. Not much would happen. We have to put some context around that. These people again will be affected in the future but are perhaps not aware of the gravity of the impacts that are looming in this proposed bill.

Something I find a bit offensive is the comment that a lot of people who would oppose such moves on vegetation management are not as tuned in or do not care for the environment, climate and other issues as someone who resides in an urban area who is perhaps more academic or across more of the science of these things. That is really offensive. By virtue of the fact that these people live out

there, they love the land. You do not live in Croydon to have a holiday. You live up there because you love living on the land and observing the animals and nature. That is part of the reason you live up there. You are not going to go and bulldoze the bejesus out of everything if you think that is going to have a detrimental effect. Arguably those people care more for that land than someone in Brisbane. Yet, if we did a poll, there would be more people in Brisbane who would support a move like this against people out there. Those people need to have a say in what is going to happen here, but that is going to be impossible to achieve in this time frame.

The point was made that we seem to be so quick to allow other forms of development like mining or whatever else that is an income-producing commercial activity but we do not apply the same measures to these areas. I also make that point.

The final point I would like to make again highlights the complexity of what we are talking about here and how you have to spend not a few days but a good part of your life in these areas and observing them. I grew up in Charters Towers and there is a place called Burdekin Downs, which one of the Knuth family now owns. I once asked my dad why they call it downs country because downs country is open country. Why do they call it Burdekin Downs because it is heavily forested country? That is what it was—it was open downs 100 years ago; now it is heavily forested country. Someone driving past now would say, 'Don't clear that,' but it always was cleared.

The open Mitchell grass plains now has seven million hectares of prickly acacia on it which is tree canopy cover. It is vegetation—seven million hectares. None of that was there in the fifties. It was all introduced in the fifties and sixties. There is so much misinformation. It is very difficult to get a grasp of this unless you are living amongst it. A lot of the people living amongst it are not going to get the chance to properly engage or prosecute the case or stand up for their rights because of this time period.

This does not pass the fairness test. I would not like to impose this on people in Brisbane, if we were talking about tree-clearing policy in Paddington. Nor should they impose this on someone living out in remote areas who will not get the same opportunity. That is not fair and it is not good government.