




Speech By
Hon. Dr Steven Miles
MEMBER FOR MOUNT COOT-THA

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

 **Hon. SJ MILES** (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef) (8.57 pm): I rise to make a contribution to this debate about the time frame for parliament's consideration of this very important bill. I will touch on some of the points raised by the member for Hinchinbrook about consultation and due consideration. First, I want to make one point clear. For those of us on this side of the House this bill and this debate is not about political pointscoreing.

Mr Molhoek interjected.

Dr MILES: It is not about one-upmanship. It is not about picking a fight. It is easy to see how much of a game this is to the opposition.

Ms Davis interjected.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Members, I am going to be firm in relation to interjections. They need to be relevant and not simply disruptive. I flag that initially for the member for Southport and the member for Aspley. All members are on notice. It is going to be a long night—maybe into the early morning.

Dr MILES: It is easy to see how much of a game this is to those opposite. They are doing this with no sense of irony at all. First of all, they call a division on the first reading of a bill—an unprecedented move where they expect members of this House to make a call without so much as a chance to even read the bill. It is the first time, I am told, since 1860 that an opposition has abused parliamentary process in such a way.

First of all, they say, 'We don't need to read the bill. We've made up our mind.' Then one breath later they turn around and say, 'Four weeks is not enough to consider the bill.' A minute ago no time was plenty of time. Now four weeks is not enough. The opposition is playing games with the parliamentary process to suit its political purposes.

On this side of the House there is a serious issue at the heart of this debate—that is, the reinstatement bill is a piece of vital environmental protection legislation. It is incumbent on this House to act quickly to avoid irreversible environmental harm. The parliament must act to ensure that the fear being peddled by those opposite on this issue does not translate into unwarranted and destructive panic clearing.

Those opposite have already been out there in the public domain trying to incite fear and panic about the reinstatement of these sensible vegetation protection measures. Earlier this week the Leader of the Opposition told the ABC that these laws were a dreadful attack on farmers. Before even seeing

the bill, he is whipping up a scare campaign calling them a dreadful attack. First, they did not need to see the bill. Second, they did not need to read the bill. Now four weeks is not enough to decide on the bill. Frankly, this is just irresponsible.

There are farmers out there losing sleep over this, and they should not be. Queensland's farmers and graziers have nothing to fear from these laws. In fact, these laws complement the good stewardship that our agricultural communities are known for. I know farmers love our land just as much as I do. If farmers could see the kind of environmental destruction that we can see—the kind of environmental destruction that the member for Hinchinbrook encouraged, the massive bulldozers, the giant chains cutting swathes through pristine forests—if farmers hearing the opposition leader's inflammatory comments could see that destruction, I know they would be as horrified as I am.

Nonetheless, it would be foolish to assume that those opposite would desist from their fear campaign, and why would they? They have a legacy to defend—a damning, destructive legacy. They know that their actions in government have caused the situation that we are in now—a situation where Queensland is generating more carbon pollution from land clearing than at any time in the last eight years. Queensland is now responsible for 90 per cent of Australia's carbon pollution from deforestation.

Those opposite know that, when the member for Hinchinbrook put out a media release saying that his government would put on hold all investigations of alleged breaches of the Vegetation Management Act, he effectively fired the starting gun. Those opposite know that, when the member for Hinchinbrook told the Rural Press Club he would take an axe to the sound, effective vegetation management laws he inherited from successive Labor governments, he effectively started up the bulldozers himself.

There is worldwide consternation about deforestation of the Amazon, where 600,000 hectares of rainforest are cleared each year, but thanks to the LNP we are nearly halfway there ourselves. The massive spike in clearing that occurred as a result was so obvious and so embarrassing for those opposite that they refused to release the data. SLATS data which both the Deputy Premier and the member for Hinchinbrook have referred to—the Statewide Landcover and Trees Study data—is prepared by scientists at the Herbarium in the department of science. It measures land clearing and carbon emissions using satellite technology. It is normally released every year, but the LNP refused to release it, fearing the facts might affect their re-election prospects.

That is why last year Labor released two years worth of data, and that is the data that shows unequivocally that land clearing rates skyrocketed under the LNP after the member for Hinchinbrook fired the starting gun. That is the LNP's legacy. That is why we know their scare campaign and fearmongering will only continue. I know those opposite will spend the night, as the member for Hinchinbrook did, trying to defend their track record and they will misuse the data just like the member for Hinchinbrook did.

Let us go to just one of the claims that has been circulating about the data. The claim that a few have made is that tree coverage has increased in Queensland. We have cut down 300,000 hectares of trees but somehow there are more trees now. They point to a figure that suggests that tree coverage might have increased by 437,000 hectares over three years. Let me tell the House how they are misusing the data. These claims started in a press release from AgForce. I work closely with AgForce on lots of things. I do not want to cast aspersions, but all the advice I have received about this claim is just wrong. Wooded vegetation includes assemblages of all woody plants—

Mr WATTS: I rise to a point of order, Mr Speaker. We do not seem to be debating the time; we seem to be debating the bill. This would be a good example of why we need more time.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I gave the member for Hinchinbrook, your shadow minister, significant latitude. I am giving the minister a similar degree of latitude, but I expect other members to note that if comments have already been made they do not repeat those comments. I understand that many members wish to speak to the bill, so I thought for the purpose of simplicity both lead speakers can put their issues on the table and that may have an impact on what other members contribute.

Dr MILES: Wooded vegetation in that study includes assemblages of all woody plants. This can include native vegetation, regrowth following clearing, plantations of native and exotic species, and woody weeds. DSITI produces a wooded extent map product and accompanying data on an annual basis. The wooded extent map is produced through a largely automated process which analyses Landsat satellite imagery, informed by field data, to estimate tree and shrub foliage cover across the state. Tree and shrub foliage cover can change over time due to seasonal fluctuations, and this can affect the estimation of tree and shrub cover from year to year.

The wooded extent map is intended to be an annual snapshot—the best possible estimate of tree and shrub foliage cover for the state for the year of production. The estimation of early vegetation regrowth and very low cover woody vegetation is approaching the limit of what can be detected from annual Landsat satellite imagery. Therefore, the wooded extent is not used for comparisons from year to year or to derive loss or gains in vegetation extent. It is, however, useful information about tree and shrub foliage cover for a range of other government applications—regional ecosystem mapping updates, assessments of bushfire hazard and risk, riparian vegetation mapping for reef reporting, and biodiversity planning and mapping. What it is not used for is assessing vegetation change from year to year.

Information about vegetation change is provided through SLATS. SLATS uses Landsat satellite imagery, field verification, expert visual interpretation and other supporting evidence like high-resolution imagery to assess these changes to vegetation. The conclusion to all of this is that the claims that derive tree coverage by comparing wooded vegetation extent from year to year are invalid. The assertion about tree coverage increasing in Queensland is simply not supported by the available data. What we do know, based on scientifically verifiable data, is that land clearing rates have now jumped to nearly 300,000 hectares per year, generating 36 million tonnes of carbon pollution each year. That is the problem we are dealing with, and that is the legacy the LNP cannot escape.

Let me come back to address the concerns that have been raised about consultation and the need for proper oversight and scrutiny by the parliamentary committee. Putting aside the need for urgency, I am confident that the time frame proposed is more than adequate for the committee to give due consideration to this bill. The Palaszczuk government is committed to consultation, unlike those opposite. We believe in meaningful consultation even with those who do not agree with us, and the development of this bill has been no different.

This started as far back as April 2015, when work commenced to identify appropriate options for reregulating high-value regrowth vegetation on freehold and Indigenous land as well as options to address clearing for high-value agriculture and irrigated high-value agriculture. The Minister for Natural Resources and Mines has previously briefed the House on the work of Professor Allan Dale of James Cook University. Professor Dale was engaged in the third quarter of 2015 to liaise with key stakeholders on a package of policy proposals that would contribute to the government's commitments. I know that the Deputy Premier has engaged in extensive consultation with stakeholders, other members of the government and government agencies.

We committed to consult on the implementation of our election commitment to reinstate Queensland's nation-leading land-clearing laws and we have delivered on this commitment. Just like it is a bit rich for those opposite to call a division on the first reading of a bill and then complain about a four-week committee consideration process, it is pretty rich for those opposite to criticise a four-week turnaround when we think back to how they used and abused the parliamentary process during their short stint in government.

Let me remind the LNP of the comments made by Campbell Newman—do members remember him? Campbell Newman flagged plans to bypass the parliamentary committee system to 'fast-track' election promises. In 2012, he announced that certain bills would not be sent to parliamentary committees for checking. Mr Newman said the LNP would look at bills 'on a case-by-case basis' to determine whether or not they needed to go to a committee for checking. Can-do said, 'Don't be surprised if we don't just take it straight through and put it through quickly. We believe we have a mandate for things that we made clear, unequivocal commitments on.' This is certainly an issue that we have made a clear, unequivocal commitment on, but we do not propose to bypass the committee process, as those opposite did. On this side of the House we believe in proper checks and balances. The time frame proposed in this motion respects proper process whilst also acknowledging the need for swift action.

We know from history that panic clearing is a real and significant risk. It has happened in the past. The risks to wildlife, our climate and the Great Barrier Reef are too significant to risk it happening again. The Palaszczuk government is determined to get tree clearing back under control in Queensland, back to sustainable levels. To do that, the parliament needs to move quickly and decisively. I commend the motion to the House.