



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

Record of Proceedings, 18 August 2016

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT (REINSTATEMENT) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. SJ MILES** (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef) (4.04 pm): It has taken us 18 months but we have nearly finished reversing the damage done by the Newman-Nicholls government to environmental protections in Queensland—almost. Tonight we have a chance to finish that job. We can consign the Newman-Nicholls approach to our environment to the history books. We can turn back what might be the worst thing the Newman-Nicholls government did to our environment.

Mr BLEIJIE: I rise to a point of order. Mr Speaker made a ruling this morning with respect to how to speak to people in this chamber, and I notice that three times in his one-minute contribution the minister has deliberately disobeyed the ruling of Mr Speaker this morning.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Linard): To which ruling are you referring?

Mr BLEIJIE: On three occasions in the last minute the minister referred to the Newman-Nicholls government, which is in direct contradiction to Mr Speaker's ruling this morning that that ought not happen.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: I have sought clarification from the Deputy Clerk. Minister, you have the call. Please do not use that title and reference.

Dr MILES: I know that is a big call—they did a lot of bad stuff in three years—but native forests are so important to our environment. The hundreds of thousands of hectares of clearing that they oversaw has been catastrophic. It is time for Queensland to again take its responsibility to future generations seriously. The SLATS report released a fortnight ago revealed that Queensland's current land-clearing rates are edging closer to levels seen 10 years ago, before broadscale clearing was banned in 2007. On current trends, land is being cleared at an average rate of over 800 hectares a day, or almost 300,000 hectares per year. We know that land clearing causes habitat loss and puts our native animals at risk of extinction. We are already a global extinction hotspot and the LNP has only made it worse.

Currently the Species Technical Committee is considering raising the classification for 21 species, many found in areas where clearing is occurring. That is why I have asked the Species Technical Committee to report back specifically on the impact of tree clearing on our native wildlife. We also know that this land clearing is directly linked to declining water quality in the Great Barrier Reef. Loss of trees destabilises soil, causing erosion and creating the fine sediment that runs on to the reef, smothering and killing coral. The costings report that I released on Thursday last week revealed that this is the most costly problem facing the reef. If we are going to protect the reef, we need trees in the ground holding the soil together and preventing the sediment run-off that blocks sunlight and suffocates

the coral. Have no doubt: if we fail to implement this component of the reef plan, we put the reef's World Heritage status at risk. The decision those opposite are making here is to put the reef back to where it was when they were in office: at risk of losing its World Heritage status. The ramifications of that for jobs and the Queensland economy will rest at the feet of those opposite.

There are other consequences. A little over an hour ago the *Guardian* Australia published a story in which Australia's biggest environmental philanthropist, David Thomas—a man who has donated \$30 million and bequeathed another \$30 million to environmental causes in Australia—said that the drive for private investment in reef water quality projects would be unsuccessful if these laws did not pass. Water quality is not the only issue here. We also need more trees if we are going to address the most serious long-term threat to the reef: climate change. The Great Barrier Reef has just come through the worst coral bleaching event on record due to warmer oceans. This is a wake-up call. At a time when the world has agreed to lessen emissions and keep global warming to below a two-degree increase, Queensland is clearing 360,000 Rugby League fields worth of trees every year. On the national front, we are now responsible for 90 per cent of Australia's land use emissions. It is not good enough.

The Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 will return responsible land-clearing restrictions to Queensland. It was a key commitment in our Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan, endorsed by UNESCO's World Heritage Committee, that we would strengthen vegetation management laws to protect remnant and high-value regrowth native vegetation, including in riparian zones. This is the same plan the LNP claimed credit for when the Deputy Premier and I convinced UNESCO to leave the reef on the World Heritage List. Then the member for Glass House, the member for Southern Downs and even the member for Callide were falling over each other to claim credit for the plan. In fact, I note that this morning the member for Nanango went off script and was still claiming credit for the plan. Now that it does not suit their political purposes, they have turned their backs on it.

These tree-clearing laws are an essential component of the Queensland and Australian governments' bipartisan Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan. I table a joint release issued by former minister Greg Hunt, the Deputy Premier and me emphasising that the plan itself has legal effect.

Tabled paper: Media release, dated 27 June 2015, from the federal Minister for the Environment, Hon. Greg Hunt, to the Deputy Premier, Minister for Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning and Minister for Trade and Investment, Hon. Jackie Trad, and the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef, Hon. Dr Steven Miles, regarding new Intergovernmental Agreement and The Reef 2050 Plan [1318].

We are obliged to implement these laws. If we do not and the reef is delisted, the LNP will be to blame. I guess when your environment spokesperson disputes the science of human induced climate change it is probably no surprise the LNP has such an ignorant position on this issue.

Dr ROWAN: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I find the minister's comments misleading and personally offensive.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Linard): You are not in your chair. Member for Moggill, are you in your assigned chair? You are not in the correct chair so I ask that you make your point of order from there. You have made a point of order. Minister, the member has requested that you withdraw the comment.

Dr MILES: I withdraw.

Miss BARTON: Madam Deputy Speaker, with respect to the member for Moggill, at the time the shadow minister who had carriage of the bill was not in the chamber and clearly the member for Moggill was acting in his capacity as a shadow minister and had carriage of the bill so it was entirely appropriate that he be in that chair.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: I have sought advice. I have made a ruling. Thank you, member for Moggill, for complying with that. The minister has withdrawn his comment.

Dr MILES: In fact, I invite the member for Moggill to meet with some actual scientists to learn more about just how settled the science of climate change is.

Dr ROWAN: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. Again I find the minister misleading and I find his comments personally offensive, as I met with scientists.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member has taken offence at the comment, Minister.

Dr MILES: I withdraw. Those same scientists can probably tell him how his party's land-clearing laws are harming the reef. There is no doubt that global temperatures have risen dangerously in the past few years and there is no doubt that human activity is the cause. There is no doubt that broadscale land clearing is one of those human activities.

I thank the Agriculture and Environment Committee for its constructive comments and recommendations, especially on the environmental offset components of the bill. I would now like to

report on how those recommendations have been implemented. These amendments were introduced to re-establish a responsible and effective offset framework that ensures unavoidable clearing of important vegetation will again require an offset to replace what is lost.

Recommendations 4 and 5 were that the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection engage with the property, resources and development sectors to assess and establish the full impact of the proposed environmental offset amendments and report back to the House. Since the bill was introduced on 17 March 2016, my department has met with the property, resources and development sectors on numerous occasions and has listened to and addressed their concerns. Contrary to their initial concerns, these amendments will not have a major impact on resource and property development including future housing affordability in South-East Queensland. Guidance criteria supporting this amendment have been drafted and circulated to key stakeholders for comment. Broader consultation on the guidelines will occur over the coming months.

One proposed change is to the threshold for requiring an offset when clearing of endangered vegetation is unavoidable, from five hectares to 0.5 hectares. This is a modest change to ensure that the thresholds at which offsets are triggered reflect the importance of the environmental values being impacted. Assessing this impact can be undertaken by examining the current extent of endangered vegetation with the Queensland Treasury's detailed modelling of future residential land supply in South-East Queensland. It indicates that this endangered vegetation occupies only two per cent, or less than 180 hectares, of the sites identified for potential future residential development within the next 10 years.

Other proposed changes involve realignment of offset triggers to the existing thresholds in the state development assessment provisions under the Planning Act which were put in place by the previous LNP government. This logical change will ensure clearing proposed above the threshold is appropriately offset.

Further, I am pleased to clarify that, with regard to the amendments enabling Commonwealth offset payments to be paid into the Queensland environmental offset account, it is not intended for this bill to allow the state to require additional payments in relation to a Commonwealth offset, as raised by both the property and resource sectors. With regard to the agricultural sector, the proposed amendments to the Environmental Offsets Act have no impact on clearing permissible under self-assessable codes and in category X areas because these activities do not trigger offsets under the act.

Finally with regard to the proposed amendments to the Environmental Offsets Act, I can also confirm that there is no retrospectivity for these amendments, and any concerns about the availability of land for offsets are also unfounded given that it is the landowner who chooses how to best use their land. I commend the bill to the House.