




Speech By
Tony Perrett

MEMBER FOR GYMPIE

Record of Proceedings, 10 May 2016

NATURE CONSERVATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr PERRETT** (Gympie—LNP) (10.02 pm): I rise to speak on the Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015. In accordance with standing order 260, and following advice from the Clerk, I declare an interest in the debate and proceedings as I am a director of a family company which holds grazing leases over state owned land. This interest is declared in my member's register of interests.

Labor cannot be trusted to manage Queensland's environment and it cannot be trusted to deal fairly with Queensland farming families. This bill once again demonstrates Labor's commitment to garner Greens preferences, no matter the cost to the environment and no matter the cost to ordinary Queenslanders. The reason Labor cannot be trusted to manage the interests of the state's declared estates is its appalling record from previous terms of office. In my contribution I will touch on why these amendments send the wrong signal to Queensland farming families—why I am concerned about confidence, trust and transparency. Let me give an example.

In 2006 the then Beattie government and his ministers set about destroying farming enterprises across Queensland. They set in place a process which would remove leaseholders from their land. A late-night, behind-closed-doors meeting between the then premier and the Greens saw a deal struck that agreed to an arbitrary percentage of Queensland being declared national park. The deal was for Greens preferences, regardless of whether there was any convincing or substantive evidence to transfer land management from one tenure to another. This included state forests which had been sustainably grazed and managed for well over a century.

Then premier Beattie was so beholden to the Greens through this preference deal that rational and well-considered policy was thrown away as quickly as the ink dried on the paper. Hardworking rural families were captured by this deal. In our case, the Labor government attempted to terminate a lease which I legitimately purchased with borrowed funds—bank mortgage—and with government consent. The Labor government offered me a short-term stock-grazing permit, as some sort of so-called compensation, which restricted my use and gave me no tenure rights, with no ability to apply for an extension of the term. It was described at the time by some legal practitioners as a form of glorified trespass.

There was no genuine consultation. There was no on-the-ground inspection of the land to discuss with me concerns the government may have had with the ongoing management of the estates under the Land Act 1994. So desperate was the Labor government to push through this deal that it instructed one of its departmental officers to reject my lease renewal application, even though that turned out to be illegal. The department did accept the application fee for renewal but chose some spurious and untested advice from the department of environment not to renew the lease.

This goes to the very heart of why I and many rural Queenslanders do not trust this Labor government with this piece of legislation. To protect my rights I sought a judicial review of the decision in the Supreme Court. His Honour said that the government had a responsibility to genuinely consider my interests in the matter and asked the Minister for Natural Resources and the Minister for Environment to produce evidence that they had properly considered our interests in this case. This included consultation and representation of facts.

Before the matter could be heard at the subsequent stage, I received an urgent request to meet state government legal and departmental officials just up the road, in the Crown Law building, to discuss an out-of-court resolution to the proceedings. While we reached a settlement and our grazing lease was renewed, it was during these discussions that I became very cynical and sceptical about the Labor government agenda. It became very clear that there were no scientific studies or evidence to support the government's claim that it needed to declare these areas national park and boot graziers out. I challenged the senior department of environment officers who were present to tell me what was in our grazing lease area that required special protection. I said, 'I am a competent, careful and sustainable land manager, as confirmed by your officers today. You tell me what is in there that requires special management and I will work with the state and conserve what is important. I will even fence it out if that is required.' Guess what? There was not one scrap of scientific evidence—not one study. Not one officer could explain why they were removing us.

My concern with the amendments to remove the provision of rolling term leases is that they will see these estates continue to be undermanaged. Currently, lessees are required to manage these lease areas in accordance with strict provisions contained in a legally binding document which is administered through a number of acts. While the minister asked that we trust him and believe that he is not removing leaseholders' existing rights, I do not. This is because if I trusted previous Labor governments I, too, would have been like so many other graziers across this state and had my grazing entitlements removed.

I would now like to touch on the very essence of what good management of these estates should look like—why it is important to provide certainty around land tenure and not spook leaseholders with changes like removing the rolling term leases we have in existing legislation. Firstly, we need to go back to the initial declaration of these national parks and establish whether they were science based or tenure based declarations. As previously mentioned, many of these estates have been sustainably grazed for well over 100 years. Graziers have worked side by side with forestry officers who are on the ground—QPWS officers, the hardworking people who wear the khaki shirts and possum badges—to establish the best management practices.

These officers, when away from their overbearing superiors, regularly tell lessees that we need graziers in these estates to assist with the day-to-day management. I am so concerned that this government does not understand what it is doing to ordinary, hardworking folk that I extend a personal invitation to you, Minister Miles, to come to my grazing property or that of my neighbours, jump in my Toyota and personally view for yourself what I am talking about. Leave your personal assistants and departmental officers behind and get on the ground with me to see for yourself. You will find these people to be genuine about their care for the land. You will find that they will work with you to establish sustainable management plans that protect the environment, not harm it as claimed in your insensitive press release on 9 February. I wish to make a perfectly sensible request of the minister—that is, go back and review the original declaration of these national parks. Review the tenure arrangements previous Labor governments have put in place. Establish whether the purported environmental credentials of these estates are best managed by removing the current managers who, at no cost, manage the declared and environmental weeds, feral animals and who manage fuel loads, thus preventing catastrophic wildfires which destroy every living animal and plant in their path. Lessees under current legislation must routinely control declared weeds and animals such as giant rat's-tail grass, groundsel bush, wild dogs, feral pigs, foxes, feral cats and rabbits. Environmental weeds such as lantana, noogoora burr, wild tobacco bush and cat's claw creeper are controlled too. These lessees control these weeds and animals at considerable expense and no cost to the state. Lessees also pay land rent to the state and local government rates to their local authority.

While the minister claims the amendments in this legislation do not change the existing rights, I am not convinced. The track record of previous Labor governments suggests otherwise. A more well-thought-out approach at the time would have considered whether these land areas should have been managed through a conservation park declaration. For the minister's benefit, I will read what that is—

A conservation park is to be managed to—

- (a) conserve and present the area's cultural and natural resources and their values; and

- (b) provide for the permanent conservation of the area's natural condition to the greatest possible extent; and
- (c) ensure that any commercial use of the area's natural resources, including fishing and grazing, is ecologically sustainable.

In closing my contribution to this debate I ask the minister to go back, change his singular view on this matter and work with leaseholders and local rural land managers to preserve and manage these estates. I also look forward to the minister accepting my personal invitation to meet with me on site to view for himself the issues I have raised tonight.