




Speech By
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**VEGETATION MANAGEMENT (REINSTATEMENT) AND OTHER LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (9.55 pm): I rise tonight to make a brief contribution to the vegetation management bill. I want to paint a picture of Queensland—Queensland under Labor. In an urban electorate in Queensland, an electorate that covers 2,900 hectares here in Brisbane, per voter they have less than a hectare each—just 936 square metres. In the electorate of Mount Isa, per voter they have 29,839,531 square metres each. When we start talking about clearing land, it is easy to see how people who live in the south-east corner can get a very unrealistic perspective of what it means when people start saying they are clearing 296,000 hectares.

If you cleared 296,000 hectares this year and you did not revisit that same 296,000 hectares of Queensland until you had cleared every other patch of Queensland, it would take 660 years before you got back to the starting place. I do not know what those opposite know about trees, but in 660 years I figure that a fair few would have grown on that patch. Regardless of what you did, I think it would be fairly well vegetated by then. We need to bring some perspective to the argument—660 years is what it would take, if we cleared at this rate, to clear all of Queensland.

Mr Cripps: You're a denier.

Mr WATTS: This is the maths. They are their figures. Let me ask this question. Let us say you are an individual here in Brisbane and you are trying to make your way in the world. Let us say you buy yourself your 936 square metres and you pay for the title deed. You buy the block of land and you clear it. You are planning to build a house. You are going to plant some hedges, plant a lawn and everything else. Then in the middle of the night the people that you voted for, the people that make the laws, turn up and say, 'Actually, your land is now worthless. You can't touch it. You cannot do anything with it. You're just going to have to sit there and look at it because we're really worried that over the next 660 years nothing much is going to grow on it unless we tell you that you can't touch it.' Take anybody's urban block of land. If I said to you, 'You cannot cut your grass for 600 years, you cannot trim your hedge for 600 years, you cannot maintain your house for 600 years, you cannot fix the cracks in your driveway for 600 years,' I put it to you that there will be a fair amount of vegetation growing through it at the end of 600 years. We need to bring some perspective to this about the size of Queensland.

The first time I came to Queensland I arrived straight from Hong Kong. I came from an area that was 400 square miles and there were 6½ million people living there. The suburb I had left was Mong Kok. It had a million people resident there in a square mile. I arrived here. We had breakfast at Brekky Creek and I drove with a good friend of mine, Kirsty, out to her father's property at Rolleston and I stood in the middle of the property.

Two people lived on this property. There were three adjoining properties, and I could see the horizon in every direction, and just two people lived there. There are people on one side of the chamber who would say that he is going to destroy Queensland if he clears the land. I put it to you: he is not

going to destroy Queensland if he clears the land. What he is going to do is grow some really nice beef that people can go down to Cha Cha Char and they can buy and have a really enjoyable meal, or they can go to the organic markets on the weekend and buy it from the farmer who is using world's best practice to deliver these goods. To do that, they need to have a profitable business. They need to have the ability to be able to clear weeds as they come up through their property. They need to have the ability to improve the land so they can grow organic vegetables for people to enjoy and to make sure they have good quality beef that is going to deliver a reasonable rate of return for the hectares they own.

This effectively means that someone can come in and say, 'Not only am I going to stop you from clearing your land; if I find there has been a problem I am going to assume you are guilty until you can prove yourself innocent. I am going to devalue it. I am going to make it retrospective. I am going to put the reverse onus of proof on you.' Can you imagine if we did this to people's title deeds on their houses, if we did this in an urban footprint? There would be riots on the street. It would be so offensive to the good governance of a state that it would be completely unacceptable to the citizens who elect representatives to come here.

Those on the government side of the chamber really need to understand what they are doing to people's property rights, because if people do not have confidence in their property rights they will stop investing. It does not matter if you are a taxidriver, a farmer or what it is you do; if your property rights cannot be defended under law, you are not going to invest. I put it to you that people will leave. The best example of that is if you go to some of the Eastern Bloc countries and you travel back in time to when property rights were not respected. They were completely destroyed by the state. They could take whatever they wanted whenever they wanted. In that environment people left, or tried to leave, in droves.

I do not want to see a Queensland like that. I want to see a Queensland where people want to come here, they want to invest, they want to develop, they want to make their way in the world, and their property rights are protected and defended by this House. If they want to grow great agricultural products and they want to do it in a sustainable way within the law, then the law needs to treat them fairly and honestly. It needs to respect their rights to be able to conduct their business and not leave them standing on shifting sand that they cannot understand and they do not know by making retrospective, reverse onus of proof type of legislation.

We have a legal problem within this bill and we definitely have a problem with the size and the scope of Queensland. I can see how it might appear to people who live on 400- or 600-square metre blocks of land. I have lived in a very small apartment block. I can see how 296,000 hectares sounds like a lot of land, but it is 0.15 per cent of Queensland and it will take 660 years to get back to that same piece of land if you cleared at that rate. I do not know what you would consider a sustainable rate of clearing, but I would say that 660 years is probably a reasonable rate of clearing. Maybe it could be higher; maybe it could be lower. Certainly it needs to be in the right place at the right time and for the right reasons, but this piece of legislation abuses so many things that this House is founded upon—the onus of proof; legislation that protects property rights. That is what this House is founded on. That is why it is here. It is not here to take those things away. If you want to take those things away, you just need the Politburo and a big army and you can take everything away whenever you want to take it away.

This House has to respect those things. I would think long and hard before we start creating precedents that do that to people. I would ask the people of Queensland to consider very carefully what this means for their property rights—the piece of land they own, the business they own, the investment they have made. Once this House starts disrespecting that and taking it away, it is a very short distance before the state controls everything for the so-called benefit of everybody.

The reality is that the people who live in this city want to be fed. They want good quality agricultural products delivered to their doors. To do that, we need sustainable farmers with good practices. We all know that Queensland has some of the best farmers in the world. Not only are they some of the most efficient; they respect the land, they respect the law, they work hard and they do a fantastic job. For this House to treat them in this way with the legislation that is proposed is abhorrent. If there was any other group of people in Queensland that this House was treating in such a bad way, everybody would be up in arms saying, 'Who on earth has proposed this legislation?' Make no mistake: the extreme greens have proposed this legislation so they can save their own necks and make sure that the member for South Brisbane and the member for Mount Coot-tha get the preferences they need to be still standing in this place.

(Time expired)