




Speech By  
**Christopher Whiting**

**MEMBER FOR BANCROFT**

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Record of Proceedings, 4 September 2018

**VEGETATION MANAGEMENT (CLEARING CODES) AND OTHER LEGISLATION  
AMENDMENT REGULATION**

 **Mr WHITING** (Bancroft—ALP) (6.01 pm): I stand today to speak against this disallowance motion moved by the opposition. I stand once again to speak out against another attempt by the LNP to wreck a fair and balanced vegetation management system. I stand to speak for the fair, balanced and workable vegetation management laws and regulations brought in by the Palaszczuk government.

I say that the LNP have been misleading and misinforming farmers and graziers. We saw that most clearly during the committee process examining the vegetation management bill. When we explained to these primary producers that they can keep farming their land in a sustainable and responsible manner, contrary to what they had heard from the LNP, they looked relieved. I will talk tonight to the LNP's pattern of spreading misinformation about our vegetation management laws and how it tries to maintain this pattern with this mischievous motion we have tonight.

I refer to the thickening of vegetation. Under the LNP laws there were massive loopholes in this code that allowed virtual broadscale clearing. We saw pictures of where there were only a few trees left in the paddocks after thinning had occurred. It was very clear in the hearings that you need a precise assessment before any thinning of vegetation.

The misinformation put out there by the LNP is epitomised by what the member for Burdekin has said. We saw some pretty disgraceful things in this parliament today, but him using that word was pretty disgraceful as well. The member for Burdekin has form. Before the hearings in Townsville he stood out the front and said that you would not be able to clear a single tree in Queensland again. I heard that he had to be walked back from that. The member for Thuringowa called him out in the media. He said that what the member for Burdekin had been saying was rubbish. The fact is that it was the LNP that brought in disruptive changes to vegetation management. We are returning to the fair and balanced system that we had before the Campbell Newman regime.

One of the things we have often heard from the LNP about these laws and regulations is that they limit the expansion of the agricultural sector. Once again, that is wrong. The LNP did not like to hear from our departmental staff that under these laws and regulations there is one million hectares available to the agricultural industry for expansion. That is land cleared for cropping that can be used for grazing and cropping. That is marked category X on the PMAVs and no permit is needed to clear it. These regulations are not stopping the expansion of the industry, despite the LNP's claims.

The LNP are happy to spread the misinterpretation that farmers and graziers will not be allowed to clear weeds. This is rubbish. Under these codes farmers can conduct weed clearing, and they can do it without the need for an application. Producers would not know that if they only listened to the LNP. Bristow Hughes, a witness at the Townsville hearing on the bill, said that he hoped he would be able to clear weeds—bellyache, poison peach, rubber vine—in his riparian zone. I told him that under the self-assessable code for weeds he could do that, and if he took out some native vegetation when doing that it would be self-assessable. Mr Calcagno, representing the canefarmers in Cairns, said that he was

concerned about being prevented from being able to clear woody weeds and guinea grass from abandoned farms they might purchase. I assured him that we are not stopping him from clearing guinea grass. He would not know that if he listened to those opposite.

We heard from Councillor Pratt, from the Barcoo Shire Council, who was concerned that they could not clear gidgee that had encroached onto the Mitchell Grass Downs bioregion. I told him that they could clear out invasive weeds, including native weeds such as gidgee, under the encroachment code. I say to these farmers that nothing has changed under these acts and regulations to stop them from doing their job in a sustainable and responsible manner. Mr Morton in Longreach knew this. He said that he found he could handle the thickening of gidgee in his area by using the encroachment code. These producers are not getting this information from the LNP.

I raise the issue of fodder harvesting. One of the greatest misconceptions peddled by the LNP is that we are stopping graziers harvesting mulga for feed. This is a mischievous mistruth. Under the LNP you could have gone to town and cleared all of your property of mulga for fodder. As members have heard, the changes allow for 500 hectares and self-audit. The new code places a limit on the area that can be harvested under that one notification. Graziers can then do another notification for a further 500 hectares. We check on them to make sure they are doing the right thing. As one of the postdoctoral fellows said at one of the hearings, in many cases that is enough fodder for cattle. As we have heard, the new code reduces the width of the strips that can be harvested at one time. That is so the vegetation remains remnant and can be regenerated. That makes sure that fodder harvesting is sustainable in the long term.

Federal Minister Littleproud has been one of the worst offenders in terms of peddling mistruths around our state—saying that we are stopping or preventing drought-stricken graziers harvesting mulga. He said that we can help graziers in drought by changing the laws to allow the harvesting of mulga. He clearly does not want his constituents to know the truth about how our fair and balanced laws and regulations actually work. It is disappointing but not surprising to see a federal minister peddle this misinformation.

One of the things we have heard today is that a lot of graziers want certainty. At the conclusion of some of our hearings I asked what landholders needed. Mr MacDonnell from Central Queensland said that he wanted vegetation management resolved and no longer used as a political football. Dominic Burden from Desert Channels Queensland said that he wanted vegetation management depoliticised and for government to set a stable platform.

It is now clear who is using this as a political football. It is the LNP. Rural producers said that they want certainty and stability more than anything else, and these regulations and this legislation deliver that certainty. The LNP should accept these regulations as a foundation for the ongoing tree-clearing regulation into the future. We do not need more instability and more uncertainty generated by its misinformation and mischief.