




Speech By
James Lister

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

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VEGETATION MANAGEMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (12.33 pm): I rise to speak to the Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018. Of course I do. It is a terrible bill. It is a bill that makes a mockery of the government's claim to govern for all Queenslanders. In fact, it is such a repugnant bill that, yesterday, hundreds of farmers were outside here protesting. When we consider how far many of them had to come—hundreds or, in a couple of cases, over 1,000 kilometres—to be here and when we consider that people on the land generally have better things to do than come to a protest, we see that their demonstration of dissent was no small thing.

This bill has been crafted by the phalanx of green extremists that the Labor Party outsources its environmental policy to. It is a bill that proposes to disadvantage the hardworking people who operate farms and live and work in the rural communities of this state. It is all about appeasing those green groups. This bill is designed to arouse a city and bush divide. It cynically manipulates the debate and casts farmers and people in the bush as backward environmental wreckers. That is completely unacceptable. This bill has been crafted to accumulate political advantage for the government at the expense of hardworking farmers who are already dealing with drought, pests and rising costs. Now, they have to contend with the state attacking their property rights and their livelihoods.

There have been many fine contributions to this debate from LNP members. An examination of the *Hansard* shows that, in speaking against this dreadful bill, the LNP members do so with a true understanding of the issues at hand. They also speak with authenticity on behalf of the communities that will be affected by this bill. I would like to add my comments to their contributions.

There can be no doubt—none whatsoever—that this government is not interested in the rightful protests of the bush. We know that, because farming and rural interests were excluded from the drafting process of this bill. They were shut out of government consultation and also in consultation with the Labor Party in the development of its environmental policy. This bill is being rammed through in just a matter of weeks. I am sure it is by design that this period includes the school holidays, Easter and the Commonwealth Games. Pleas for additional time for consultation with the community were rebuffed by the government.

As stated by many affected industry groups, councils and other bodies, before this bill was introduced there was no consultation whatsoever with the bush. The LNP's dissenting report of the committee contains vivid examples of this pattern of exclusion. I will read a few. Travis Tobin, the Chief Executive Officer of the Queensland Farmers' Federation, said—

Disappointingly, the government did not consult with the agricultural sector and key stakeholders before the 2016 bill was introduced and nor has it done so before tabling the 2018 bill we are here to discuss today. Considering the significant issue vegetation management is for the sector, this is not only disappointing but also concerning.

Dan Galligan, the Chief Executive Officer of Canegrowers said—

There has been no consultation on this matter.

My honourable friend the member for Condamine asked Ms Joanne Rea, the Chair of Property Rights Australia, if there had been any consultation. Her response was—

Absolutely none.

My honourable friend then asked—

Is that surprising?

Ms Rea replied—

I find it disturbing but not surprising.

Councillor Mike Pratt from the Barcoo Shire Council said—

I am on the Desert Channels board as well. None of the NRM groups were consulted before all of this was put in place. Surely the NRM groups should have had some input here and they were not consulted.

Ms Darlene Irvine of the Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils said—

We are again disappointed that the consultation period was so short that many councils were unable to consider the impacts and make an informed submission through their councils. We are also disappointed that again there are no regulations to read in partnership with the bill, especially as the state has had two years to develop them and this was an issue last time.

I think the contributions from those who were frozen out of the development of this bill speak for themselves. This bill is hasty, rushed and is intended to be pushed through without the proper consultation with those people who are going to be impacted. I thank my honourable friends the member for Condamine, the member for Bundaberg and the member for Buderim for their excellent dissenting report. That report included comments made by people who appeared before the committee in its hearings that give voice to the overwhelming dismay that is felt by rural and agricultural interests about the impact of this bill and also the spectre of future regulatory meddling with the codes.

I say again that this government being a government that governs for all Queenslanders is just a flagrant falsehood. It is nonsense. The LNP members who have spoken prior to me in this debate have provided ample technical rebuttal to the bill. My honourable friends the members for Burdekin, Gympie, Lockyer, Gregory, Condamine, Bundaberg, Buderim, Toowoomba South, Caloundra and Scenic Rim—

An honourable member: Costo.

Mr LISTER: I take that interjection—along with the member for Whitsunday have exposed in devastating detail the flaws in the data, science and logic that abound in this bill.

In fact, the exposure commenced before that. It was during the committee hearings when the public was able to go and make their contributions and be questioned by the committee that the hollowness of this bill became apparent to all. In my contribution I would like to focus on the impacts that this bill will have on people: people who are farmers, people who live in regional communities and people who work in or operate the small businesses in those communities.

This is a bill that is an alarming affront to the rights of property owners and a threat to the economic future of families and communities. In order to satisfy the political needs of this government, the rights of property owners to manage their land, to invest in it and to reap just reward is being curtailed. What this means in many cases is that improvement of property is prevented and job creating and maintaining investment ceases. Landholders' property values are diminished by laws like this. This has flow-on effects to the ability of local councils to collect rates and provide services for their communities. Less investment, less production and reduced rates for councils equals a triple whammy against rural interests and rural communities.

At the AgForce rally yesterday I bumped into a few people from my electorate of Southern Downs. The first one was Mr Linden Charles who is a farmer in Inglewood. He is a grain farmer and has sheep as well. He scoffs at the government's idea that he needs to be regulated in how he manages his own property. He knows his property better than anyone else and he has looked after it awfully well. He has also complained that this sort of attack on landholders' rights diminishes the value of his property and it is threatening his impending retirement. Can members imagine seizing a portion of someone's superannuation arbitrarily? It is unthinkable, but that is exactly the effect it will have on some farmers.

I also met a leafy green vegetable producer from Bapaume in the Granite Belt part of my electorate, Mr Howard Poole. He explained to me that, because of the unique climate of the Granite Belt, it is possible to grow each year many crops of leafy green vegetables and that a single 2.5-hectare area can provide \$70,000 crop after \$70,000 crop, provided water is available. If water is available but

they cannot clear the land to cultivate, look at the loss in production, the loss in investment and the loss in potential jobs in that very labour-intensive industry. What becomes of that potential growth? It is lost. What will be the impact of that lost growth on communities like mine and many others around the state? People who want jobs, people who are working hard in small business and struggling need that economic activity. A government that sits in Brisbane and imposes crazy tree-clearing laws on electorates like mine is doing them a great disservice. This bill is an inequity. I oppose it and I will be supporting the amendments foreshadowed by my honourable friend, the member for Burdekin.