




Speech By
James Lister

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

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ADJOURNMENT

Vegetation Management

 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (7.10 pm): I rise tonight to speak on behalf of the primary producers in my electorate of Southern Downs who have been unfairly disadvantaged by the actions of the government under the Nature Conservation Act 1992. I want to speak about what are colloquially known as 'blue dots', which are markings on environment department maps that purport to show where endangered plant species might be present.

Each blue dot on a landholder's property creates a staggering 3,100-acre circle on that spot in which clearing, cultivation and improvement of land are prohibited. It is up to the landholder to pay the considerable costs of a consultant biologist to demonstrate that the protected species in question is not in fact present before the full rights of their land use are restored. Landholders can be suddenly faced with having huge areas made unavailable for production, whether or not a protected plant species is in fact present. Having blue dots all over their property devalues a landholder's property, especially when they are considering retirement and they want to sell and their retirement savings are effectively void.

A lack of common sense and a heavy-handed application of the act and its regulations hurt primary producers in my electorate. For example, there is Mr Linden Charles, whose properties are affected by blue dots concerning a species of cycad. He has more than 10,000 acres of land tied up under blue dots and he has spent many thousands of dollars on surveying the presence of this cycad. It transpires that the cycad is only present in the areas where he has improved his property and farmed it. It is not in any places where the remnant vegetation still exists on his land.

The obvious conclusion is that it is his farming activities and his grazing activities that have preserved and spread this endangered species. If the purpose of the act is to protect threatened species, this application of the act appears to achieve the opposite and at enormous personal cost to Mr Charles. There is also the case of Mr Graham Flood, whose property is beset by blue dots that he maintains apply to a neighbouring property, not his own. Yet he too is obliged to spend thousands of dollars on consultants to prove his case whilst in the meantime he cannot use his land as he wishes.

I have written to the environment minister about these cases, and I thank her for the courtesy and the promptness of her replies. However, she has not dealt with my pleas that common sense should prevail to stop obvious injustices to landholders like Mr Charles and Mr Flood. If the government were serious about helping struggling farmers in rural communities in these times of terrible drought, they would show some common sense here and ease up on farmers like Messrs Charles and Flood. We need to let common sense prevail and let farmers use their land as they wish.