




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MOUNT OMMANEY

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VEGETATION MANAGEMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms PUGH** (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (6.07 pm): I rise today as a member of the committee to speak to the Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I firstly want to place on the record my thanks to the parliamentary committee secretariat who worked tirelessly on the bill. They did a fantastic job looking after this particular piece of legislation. I am sure that all of the members of the committee would join me in thanking them. I have immense respect for the hard work they put into drafting this report. I also want to thank all of the committee members—the member for Bundaberg, the member for Buderim, the member for Condamine, the member for Ipswich West and me, as the lone female—who participated in the hearings and, of course, the member for Bancroft, who did a wonderful job in pulling together the report and also in facilitating and running the many hearings where we heard from witnesses.

As we have heard today, over the last few months our committee travelled to Cloncurry, Longreach and Rockhampton, among many other places, and we heard from hundreds of witnesses. On our tour we had the opportunity to hear firsthand from many landholders and environmental groups. I want to thank the many, many witnesses who travelled hours and hours—some travelled across flooded roads—to share their stories and views with us. Hearing from witnesses is an essential part of the committee's work and, in addition to the many submissions and departmental briefings, they formed the basis for the final recommendations in our report.

These hearings are instrumental in putting a face and a voice to the submissions. They are an opportunity to hear firsthand the core concerns of landholders and environmental advocates. During these hearings some key themes emerged. I will speak to these.

One of the key concerns raised by landholders was around fodder harvesting for mulga. Many farmers raised concerns that they may be unable to harvest mulga in times of drought, both declared drought and undeclared drought. One of the recommendations our committee report made was to ensure farmers can continue to use the mulga crop to feed their stock during times of drought, both declared and undeclared. Indeed, over the past six years our farmers have seen plenty of that. This approach is supported by the Queensland Herbarium, which agrees that our farmers are doing it tough and they should not have to wait until their land is drought declared to use mulga to feed their stock. I am pleased that this legislation gets the balance right and allows farmers to continue harvesting mulga for fodder while also moving to put an end to broadscale land clearing.

Another outcome we saw was a commitment to continue to improve the Statewide Landcover and Trees Study data. Our SLATS data is generally recognised as being amongst the best in the world but, in keeping with the Palaszczuk government's commitment to innovation, we will not stand still. We will continue to improve our data collection methods and ensure that our data continues to be among world's best practice. We have released the first major dataset from SLATS since 2013 and are committed to continually improving this data to ensure the clearest possible picture of the state of Queensland.

Our committee also recommended an increase in extension staff in regional Queensland. It was saddening to hear from many farmers during our hearings that they were also impacted by Newman's Public Service cuts in the form of natural resources departmental staff. This means that our farmers can no longer access departmental staff when they need them. We recognise that it is critical that our farmers and landholders have access to quick—

Opposition members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Dr Robinson): Order! Those on my left.

Mr Bleijie interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Manager of Opposition Business, I warn you now.

Ms PUGH: We on this side of the House recognise that it is critical that our farmers and landholders have access to quick and easy information when they need it. I hope that members on all sides of the House can agree on just how important it is that all Queenslanders have access to information when they need it.

To further scaffold this commitment to implementing additional staff, our committee's report also recommended that we have a concerted education campaign around the implementation and implications of the bill as there has been a large amount of misinformation around what this bill will mean for our farmers.

It is disappointing that many of the contributions from those opposite today have not directly addressed the legislation. I intend to respect the efforts of the over 120 people who appeared as witnesses by speaking to the legislation and the committee's recommendations. Witnesses from all sides agree that the vast majority of farmers are doing the right thing. However, the dramatic increase in large-scale clearing we have seen since Newman reversed his 2012 election commitment not to change the legislation cannot stand. I went to the last election with a clear commitment to support the Palaszczuk government's legislation to end broadscale land clearing. I am proud to be part of the committee that has been responsible for consulting widely on this legislation, and the recommendations by the committee reflect our commitment to get the balance right. I am proud to support this bill. I commend it to the House.