




Speech By
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VEGETATION MANAGEMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mrs GILBERT** (Mackay—ALP) (6.34 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018. In 2015 during the Queensland state election the Queensland government made a commitment to protect the environment through vegetation management legislation, and we made this commitment again during the 2017 election. We know that regrowth vegetation provides a range of environmental and ecological values. It assists in managing erosion and reducing the amount of sediment and nutrients entering waterways; it provides shelter for domestic stock; and it provides habitat, including food resources for fauna, which also assists in managing pests. Vegetation provides habitat through the provision of hollow logs and debris on the ground. Regrowth can also be valuable in providing wildlife corridors within landscapes. That is why it is important to recognise the value of regrowth in this bill.

During the last parliament the Palaszczuk government introduced a bill to do just this, and we know that it was defeated in the House. During that time there was comprehensive consultation as there was with the current bill. During the time of the last government it was a pleasure for me to be on the Agriculture and Environment Committee, and I would like to remind members of some of the information we gathered from Australian professors who are world leaders in their areas of environmental expertise.

Professor Bunn, Professor Catterall, Associate Professor Maron, Professor Possingham and Dr Reside represented a group of 28 senior environmental scientists from institutions across Queensland. They collectively represented a group of 14 professors, three ARC laureate fellows and directors of eight research institute centres that are focused on environmental science around terrestrial, marine and freshwater ecosystems, carbon accounting, remote sensing, and conservation and natural resource management. The newly formed committee responsible for the current bill also travelled and listened to many stakeholders, and there is a lot of collective information about this bill here in the House. Associate Professor Maron reported to the former committee—

The aim of the Vegetation Management Act is to protect native vegetation biodiversity, manage ecosystem processes, avoid land degradation and reduce carbon emissions, but instead the current version of the act is seeing over 100,000 hectares of native ecosystems being cleared each year including endangered ecosystems. Run-off from terrestrial land uses is reducing water quality and increasing the stress on the Great Barrier Reef. Biodiversity is continuing to decline and opportunities for the recovery of threatened species and ecosystems are being foreclosed.

We can do better than this. We need to leave our land in good shape for future generations. I see that the current committee heard from landholders who believe it is better to have grass on waterways instead of trees to reduce run-off and erosion. The same arguments were put to the professors. Professor Bunn stated—

... in nearly every catchment that you look at, whether it is the Gulf of Carpentaria or from the Normanby all the way down to Brisbane, most of the sediment that gets into the channel, channel network and then out to the coastal zone comes from the channel network ... 'most' is greater than 90-95 per cent of the sediment load.

Professor Bunn continued—

... when you clear vegetation you increase amount of surface run-off that gets concentrated down into the channel network and increase the power of the stream to cause erosion. That is exacerbated when the vegetation clearing goes into those gully networks and the riparian zones as well. Not only do you decrease what they call the roughness, the slowing down of water in those landscapes, but you also reduce the resistance of the ground to erosion from that event. Those two things work in unison to create a greater erosion potential. What we see then is the generation of increased channel erosion, further concentration of the flow into the channel network ... slope gullies or alluvial gullies. Certainly when you look at where the big erosion problems are across the Queensland coast, these are usually in places where those events, gullying and channel erosion, have occurred.

Dr Reside reported that we also need to look after the biodiversity of our ecosystems. Queensland has the largest number of endemic animals of any state in Australia—animals found nowhere else on the planet. We are still finding and describing new species every year, species that have never been seen before. These are geckos, frogs, skinks and lizards. Most of these are in North Queensland. This remarkable biodiversity is under threat from tree clearing. Dr Reside did not say to stop clearing all land but to regulate and protect biodiversity. Some of these species are found only on private land. We need intact ecosystems—the systems that are most likely to withstand climate change. Intact ecosystems are essential. Professor Possingham said—

It is a fact that extinction rates are 100 to 1,000 times the background rate. Triple-bottom-line sustainable eco-systems would mean that ultimately everything should be stable—the economy, social issues and the environment—and they should all be going flat or up ... At the moment we are losing on the biodiversity side. The fact is that we are losing species at 100 to 1,000 times the normal historical rates.

Mr Kealley, the Senior Manager of Environment and Sustainability for Canegrowers, also appeared before the last committee and quoted Paul Schembri when he said—

... the drivers of the environment and economics are aligned. You cannot have a successful business or profitable business unless you manage those two things effectively. The cane industry has its Smartcane BMP, best management practice program.

Recently I was talking to a miller from North Queensland who reported that only about 15 per cent of his growers had obtained their BMP. To get the balance right, there needs to be more done to assist farmers to engage in BMP for sustainable cropping, which will also improve their crop output. We can do this and have more output rather than clearing more land. In the long run farming cannot be sustainable without viable ecosystems. It was the compelling science that convinced me that this legislation on tree clearing needs to be amended. Important decisions about the environment must be made on fact, not on matters of the heart. That is why I commend this bill to the House.