




Speech By
Kim Richards

MEMBER FOR REDLANDS

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VEGETATION MANAGEMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms RICHARDS** (Redlands—ALP) (11.59 am): I proudly rise in this House today to speak to the Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018. Queensland is an incredibly special place socially, economically and environmentally. We are all custodians of some of the world's most environmentally sensitive and important landscapes, rivers and marine environments. We have an incredible level of biodiversity that is renowned on the global stage. I know, as do most Queenslanders, that the responsibility for the ongoing protection of our environment is vested with us all and, importantly, with the government in ensuring we set the right controls within the legislation. We sit in a privileged position in this place and whereas legislation can sometimes be difficult, at the heart of all of our activities in considering legislation must be the interests of all Queenslanders. The legislation we pass here in this place is how we will be judged by all Queenslanders now and into the future.

Trees and vegetation have vital importance to the environment that is often undermined or simply oversimplified. Land clearing has, and continues to have, consequent effects on the climate that is intensified depending on the rate of occurrence. It is well documented that Queensland was historically the land-clearing capital of Australia and, ashamedly, it is back at the top again, a position we cannot be proud of. The current statistics have us clearing over a thousand football fields a day. Just imagine that: a thousand football fields a day. We have heard a lot from the other side of the House about shonky science, but let's talk about the science facts.

What we do know is that clearing trees not only releases carbon emissions into the atmosphere; it alters the climate by increasing temperature, altering circulation of heat and moisture and thus changing rainfall. We know how devastating droughts are to our farmers. It is of concern that tree-clearing areas can have far wider reaching implications with regional and global effects. This further emphasises the need to regulate land clearing here in Queensland.

The science is further validated in the submission received from the University of Queensland's Centre for Biodiversity and Conservation Science in which Associate Professor Maron writes—

We are writing to you on behalf of the University of Queensland's Centre for Biodiversity and Conservation Science ... a dynamic team of multidisciplinary conservation scientists, with expertise in ecology, biogeography, decision science, mathematics, economics, spatial analysis, social science and climate modelling. The team has worked extensively with state and federal governments to develop and refine environmental policy.

It is well established that and clearing rates in Queensland have increased dramatically over the past five years, in particular after the changes in vegetation laws under the Newman government in 2013.

There is a strong evidence base that land clearing causes myriad problems for Queensland's environment as detailed in the attached submission ... originally made by a group of 28 concerned senior Queensland environmental scientists to the 2016 Parliamentary Inquiry on a related Bill, and a scientific paper authored by—

the University of Queensland's CBCS scientists.

The clearing of trees, bushland and other native vegetation represents the greatest threat to native wildlife and biodiversity in Queensland. Again, we know the science is clear: land clearing is connected with ecosystem damage and mass loss of wildlife. I can tell honourable members that this has never been more evident than in my electorate in the Redlands where we have seen our koala population rapidly decline in direct correlation to land clearing. What is interesting to note is that the clearing of these lands has not been for the continuation of the wonderful farming traditions of our great red soils but to clear lands for sprawling small-lot housing development. The clearing was never about preserving what was once known as the great salad bowl of South-East Queensland. I table these images of the fertile, producing farmlands of the Redlands and what is happening with them now.

Tabled paper: Photographs depicting vacant blocks in new housing development [\[589\]](#).

Yesterday the member for Nanango suggested that the farmers she stood shoulder to shoulder with would be reduced to potential criminals after the introduction of this legislation. I apologise to the farmers for this type of commentary because we all know that farmers have successfully operated under this level of legislation previously—and not in criminal activity. I understand that the farmers have been experiencing difficulties with vegetation and soil fertility, are struggling with drought and have a strong belief that their economic survival is underpinned by their ability to clear trees. It is understandable that with farming being their main source of income, they are concerned with the immediate solution of these issues. However, this need for an immediate solution should not distract from our need to deliver a sustainable strategy to regenerate existing degraded agricultural lands. We must think with a longer term view to prosperity and what prosperity will look like in the future. This is achievable and it has been demonstrated that it is achievable under these laws previously.

I reiterate that it is important to remember that agriculture thrived historically for over a decade under stricter tree-clearing laws. In fact, the industry grew by more than \$2 billion in sector profitability. It has been proven that we can get the balance right between agriculture and our environment. The legislation is about getting it right while also backing the best standards that farmers can implement every day. I know that our farmers do an amazing job. They have been successful at operating under these strict laws before and I know that they will be successful at doing it again. It is also important to note that our government is committed to establishing a flagship \$500 million Land Restoration Fund that will directly support Queensland based land sector carbon projects and create new jobs and opportunities in this growing industry. It is important for us in this place to be continually looking at how we create jobs and jobs that deliver on a sustainable future.

To conclude, I want to touch on the Great Barrier Reef and what this legislation means to the next generation of Queenslanders and, indeed, the world. The future of the Great Barrier Reef is inextricably linked to how Queensland deals with its land clearing. The federal LNP government has just spent the past weekend cooing in Cairns over their \$500 million investment towards the future health of the marine park that includes multimillion dollar commitments to protect the reef and to secure its viability, along with the 65,000 jobs it creates for Queensland and the \$6 billion annually it injects into our economy. This is a natural wonder and is an incredible asset to Queensland. We as a state and nation have pledged in our Reef 2050 Plan to address the environmental concerns of UNESCO about the Great Barrier Reef's future. This plan is redundant if we do not have legislation in place that prescribes how we manage land clearing.

The LNP federal environment minister, Greg Hunt, went to Bonn in Germany to outline Australia's long-term commitment to protect the reef. Mr Hunt said the Great Barrier Reef faced real challenges, like any reef, such as climate change and water quality issues, and we know that land clearing plays a significant part in ensuring climate change is managed. He described it as a 'game-changing' blueprint. He said, 'We have clearly heard the concerns of the World Heritage Committee.'

There is so much at stake if we do not ensure we protect our environment. Honourable members need only to look around the world at countries where the lack of legislation has allowed mass deforestation and where poor vegetation management controls have existed to see what is really at stake for future generations.

I will finish where I started. The legacy we leave behind must be one that all Queenslanders—I repeat: all Queenslanders—can be proud of and one that secures our world for future generations. I commend this bill to the House.