




Speech By  
**Lachlan Millar**

**MEMBER FOR GREGORY**

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## **VEGETATION MANAGEMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (4.32 pm): I rise today to put on the public record my vehement opposition to the Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018. This bill is ill-informed, it is irresponsible and it will cause irreparable damage to the agricultural sector in Queensland.

Farmers and graziers from the back country in Boulia, Bedourie and Birdsville to Duarina, Clermont, Emerald and Springsure in the east have expressed their strongest possible opposition to this bill. One only had to look out the front this morning to see the opposition to this bill. They understand that this legislation is bad for Queensland; that it will lock up 1.7 million hectares of developed farming land; that quarantining remnant vegetation and restricting farmers and graziers from thinning or undertaking other responsible vegetation management activities will actually produce perverse outcomes that will contravene the policy objectives of this legislation; and that removing the development of high-value agriculture as a purpose for clearing significantly undermines the viability of Queensland's agricultural industry and our export potential.

Like me, they also understand that there is absolutely no scientific justification for amending the existing legislation—that it is a political power play and a page straight out of the Greens' playbook. The Labor Party have ignored all logic, science and truth on the issue and are insistent on selling out our agricultural sector for their own political gain. The government's own acting science leader for the Remote Sensing Centre, who is responsible for tracking ground cover, land use, vegetation changes, fire scars and water bodies across Queensland, conceded during a committee hearing last month that the mapping of regrowth is very difficult to do and that there may actually be a net gain in vegetation in Queensland. He confirmed what we have always known—that the government is great at using clearing rates to justify their blatant attack on farmers and graziers but are conveniently bad at using available technology to measure revegetation rates around the state.

The reality is that the science behind this legislation is wrong. The Labor Party are using flawed computer generated algorithms and skewed data to support their political agenda in the city, and our farmers and graziers are paying a very steep price for it. This legislation is flawed. There is no doubt about it. I have a great respect for the democratic process. I can agree to disagree with members opposite in the service of the greater good of our state, but nothing about this legislation is in the service of anything other than a dirty political deal.

The Labor Party have showed complete ignorance of the effects this legislation will have across Queensland. During the committee proceedings, the executive director of land policy from the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy admitted that the government had not commissioned any kind of economic modelling to show exactly how this legislation will impact our agricultural sector and thousands of farming enterprises across the state. They do not know and, what is worse, they do not want to know and they do not care. The legislation revokes the rights of farmers and graziers to develop their land including land which is freehold or has been previously cleared legally. It quarantines vegetation as high-value regrowth in areas previously unrestricted and, where vegetation

is 15 years or older, this legislation removes all rights of farmers and graziers to undertake routine land management activities without a single dollar of compensation. It is akin to rescinding a liquor licence from a country publican without cause and without compensation.

In the context of this debate, it is important for us to understand that a large proportion of the vegetation management activities undertaken in rural, regional and remote Queensland is for the purpose of maintaining previously cleared land and for other routine vegetation management practices including the construction of fences and firebreaks which are very important for rural and regional Queensland. These types of vegetation management practices are conducted as part of the broader land management plans devised by primary producers which make concessions for unexpected natural disasters, fluctuations in commodity prices and other factors like financial viability. However, this bill will slap so much red tape on the agricultural industry that it will significantly impact the productivity and the profitability of thousands of farming and grazing businesses right across Queensland.

This legislation will also undermine the potential of agricultural development supported by the Rookwood Weir project. The billion dollar Rookwood Weir project was touted as the driver for new high-value agricultural development in the Central Highlands. However, this bill calls all of that into question. If this bill is passed, it will remove the development of high-value agriculture as a purpose for clearing which means we will have no new cotton, no new chickpeas, no new sorghum and the list goes on. To put it simply, this legislation will stop the second most profitable export industry.

Our farmers are environmental stewards. They have to be because their livelihoods depend on it. They work hard to put food on our tables and fibre on our backs. They are the backbone of the agricultural industry and contribute to Queensland's \$10 billion agricultural export industry—a very valuable industry for the state. In the electorate of Gregory alone, the Central Highlands produces agricultural products with a gross value of \$740 million each year. The central west region contributes nearly one quarter of Queensland's total exports. The farmers and graziers I represent certainly have a lot of skin in the game. However, if this bill is passed, not only will it stifle agricultural production in the bush but it will also stifle development in the city. This legislation will affect the budget bottom line in Queensland. Not only will every single Queenslander end up paying more taxes; it will affect the infrastructure programs across the state—hospitals, schools and roads. They will all take a hit.

I come from agriculture. I think everybody knows that it is very dear to my heart. It has been part of my life and the lives of my father, my grandfather and my great-grandfather—generation after generation. It is something I am passionate about. We should all be passionate about it. I know that the LNP and members on this side of the House are very passionate about agriculture. I take this opportunity to thank the shadow minister for natural resources, the member the Burdekin, and the shadow minister for agriculture, the member for Gympie, who are very keen on making sure this bill is not passed. I call on those opposite and the minister for agriculture to not pass this bill. Having listened to the pleas of hundreds of primary producers around the state who have been kicked down by seven years of relentless drought, I am imploring members of the Labor Party opposite to please not support this bill.

This legislation will stop agriculture in its tracks. It will undermine investment opportunities in our primary industries. It will compromise the significant contribution agriculture makes to the Queensland economy. It will prohibit primary producers from developing and implementing long-term business management plans, undertaking drought preparedness activities and improving productivity. We need a more moderate approach to vegetation management—one which will deliver environmental, social and economic benefits. There is no need to rush this legislation through. We in this House have a responsibility to produce policy outcomes that are in the interests of all Queenslanders. Unfortunately, this bill will not do that.

This bill will lock up 1.7 million hectares of developed farm land with no compensation. It will ban all future agricultural development in Queensland by removing agriculture as a relevant purpose under the Planning Act. This legislation is being introduced to satisfy the green groups, as payback for preferences to Labor in inner-city seats. This legislation is based on politics and politics alone. It is greedy politics by the Labor Party—to save their jobs and not create jobs in agriculture. It is back to the bad old days of the Labor Party when farmers and graziers were demonised for political purposes.

I cannot and will never support the kind of legislation that stops agriculture and the future of farming generations in their tracks. The young kids at today's rally were aged five and six, were dressed in their green shirts and had their boots and hats on. They want to be farmers and graziers. They want to be just like mum and dad. They want to be the next generation on the land. They need every bit of support. This legislation stops them and agriculture in their tracks. I call on members opposite to do the right thing and not support this bill, because it will stop agriculture in its tracks.