




Speech By
Hon. Leanne Enoch

MEMBER FOR ALGESTER

Record of Proceedings, 4 September 2018

**VEGETATION MANAGEMENT (CLEARING CODES) AND OTHER LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT REGULATION**

Disallowance of Statutory Instrument

 **Hon. LM ENOCH** (Algester—ALP) (Minister for Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, Minister for Science and Minister for the Arts) (5.43 pm): I rise in opposition to the disallowance motion moved by the member for Burdekin. The LNP's credibility on this issue was cleared away in 2013 when they reversed Labor's sensible, longstanding vegetation management laws. Labor's laws provided for sustainable land management and when the LNP tore them up, tree clearing in Queensland quadrupled and reached a rate of 1,000 football fields a day.

Mr Millar interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Stewart): Order!

Ms ENOCH: That was unsustainable and posed a risk to our native wildlife and the health of the Great Barrier Reef. We saw a 300—

Mr Millar interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Gregory, order. Members, before I call the member for Algester, I remind you of the fact that we actually listened to the member for Burdekin in silence. I ask you to show the same respect to other members when they get to their feet.

Ms ENOCH: We saw a 351 per cent increase in the clearing of woody vegetation in reef catchments between 2010-11 and 2015-16. That would have put at risk tens of thousands of jobs that are reliant on the Great Barrier Reef, put the reef's World Heritage status at risk and driven native wildlife to extinction. The Premier has set our government's key priorities over this term, and in the Our Future State: Advancing Queensland's Priorities framework one of these priorities is protecting the Great Barrier Reef. Protecting the Great Barrier Reef and the commitments we made to the international community required scientific insight to make decisions. Our comprehensive vegetation management laws are about preserving habitat and protecting the Great Barrier Reef.

As the Minister for Science as well as the Minister for Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, I am a passionate advocate for ensuring all of my department's decisions are based on science. The Palaszczuk government is retaining accepted development vegetation clearing codes where they are supported by the best available science. An independent report by Cardno, commissioned by the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy, released in November 2015, raised concerns that the accepted development vegetation clearing codes did not completely comply with the purpose of the Vegetation Management Act 1999.

Our election commitment to the people of Queensland in 2017 included amending the accepted development vegetation clearing codes based on the Queensland Herbarium's scientific advice. In 2016-17 the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy consulted with key stakeholders on the fodder-harvesting code and the management of thickened vegetation code. Early in 2018 the government requested the Queensland Herbarium to conduct a scientific review of the fodder-harvesting code, the managing thickened vegetation code and the compliance of these codes with the purpose of the Vegetation Management Act. The Queensland Herbarium science report recommended amendments to these codes to reduce ecological risk and biodiversity loss and to better meet the purpose of the Vegetation Management Act. The Herbarium's report on these two codes was independently reviewed by the CSIRO, which endorsed the Herbarium's recommendations. We doubled down on the science.

The fodder-harvesting code recommendations were to ensure that harvesting of this valuable drought resource was sustainable into the future. The new fodder-harvesting code places a limit of 500 hectares on the area that can be harvested under one notification. Landholders can make as many notifications as they need. Before they make a second or subsequent notification they must undertake a self-audit to ensure that their harvesting complies with the code.

The CSIRO reviewed the Queensland Herbarium's improvement to the managing thickened vegetation code but concluded that these activities were too high an ecological risk to be self-assessable. The CSIRO recommended that managing thickened vegetation be assessed under a development application. This recommendation is based on the best available science and has been accepted by the government.

Let me be clear: farmers can continue to harvest mulga and other fodder species to help feed their hungry stock by following the accepted development code. The code is designed to ensure that the harvesting is sustainable. While there is a limit on the area that can be harvested under one notification, farmers can make as many notifications as they need. The government is also helping primary producers to manage their business during the current severe drought conditions through a range of drought services including financial assistance, livestock nutrition and animal welfare information, and business management strategies.

As I have outlined, our government's vegetation management decisions are backed by science that has been expertly prepared by the Queensland Herbarium and peer reviewed by the country's leading science body, the CSIRO. During debate on our vegetation management bill earlier this year, much was made of the science behind the Statewide Landcover and Trees Study report. It is important to note that the recent 2015-16 SLATS report was reviewed externally by international experts at the Remote Sensing Research Unit of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research in South Africa. What this means is that the Queensland Herbarium's science is peer reviewed and it stacks up.

This government is committed to using science to guide the sustainable use of native vegetation for the benefit of Queenslanders now and into the future. The impacts of climate change on our environment are clear. Our vegetation management laws are about alleviating one of the factors putting a strain on the environment and the Great Barrier Reef.

As well as reintroducing sensible vegetation management laws, the Palaszczuk government is also establishing a \$500 million Land Restoration Fund to facilitate a pipeline of Queensland based carbon reduction projects that also deliver additional environmental, social and economic co-benefits for land managers, their communities and ecosystems. This commitment reflects the findings of consultants Energetics that Queensland's carbon farming sector could be worth up to \$8 billion by 2030 under certain conditions. This flagship project is an important opportunity for landholders, particularly farmers and traditional owners, to earn additional income through caring for their land.

The Palaszczuk government accepts the science on climate change. We recognise that this is a challenge for everyone. Unfortunately, last week we saw our new Prime Minister dismiss climate change as an issue impacting drought-stricken farmers. At the same time the PM made the dismissive remark, 'The climate is changing. Everybody knows that.' This is from the man who brought a lump of coal into the federal parliament and leads a party that refuses to commit to energy policy. Unfortunately, we see an opposition that is ignoring the science of climate change and the science of vegetation management. National Farmers' Federation president Fiona Simpson understands the role that climate change is playing in the drought. She said—

It's a drought that we're seeing out there now, but we also have to respond to climate change and the fact that that could make these events more severe and more regular.

In the same way, the science is clear that our vegetation management laws will assist the Great Barrier Reef in being more resilient to the effects of climate change. Whilst the federal government is in disarray on many fronts—least of all on who should lead their party—they are shamefully dropping the ball on climate change and protecting our environment for the future. The motion before the House today demonstrates the same lack of leadership on climate change and science based action from the LNP.

The Palaszczuk government is unashamed in our commitment to evidence based decision-making to get the best result for all of Queensland. We are the custodians of the largest living organism on the planet. Vegetation management and the evidence based actions we are taking on climate change give the Great Barrier Reef the best possible chance. I call on those opposite to demonstrate a similar commitment to science based decision-making. I oppose the motion.