




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR CONDAMINE

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VEGETATION MANAGEMENT (CLEARING CODES) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT REGULATION

Disallowance of Statutory Instrument

 **Mr WEIR** (Condamine—LNP) (5.52 pm): I rise to support the disallowance motion moved by the shadow minister, the member for Burdekin, 'Sir' Dale Last. This disallowance motion is the result of an amendment to the codes that underpin the vegetation management legislation introduced into this House earlier in the year. At the time, as deputy chair of the committee, I made the prediction that the devil would be in the detail regarding this legislation. That is what we are now seeing.

When the bill was going through the committee process and then debated in the House, the government repeated over and over that landowners would still be able to go about business as usual, including the harvesting of mulga. Landowners, AgForce, QFF, Property Rights Australia and other rural bodies told the government that this legislation was not practical. They asked to be included in the development of the new codes to try and achieve a workable outcome, but to no avail. This government knew better. Local landowners' concerns were ignored.

Instead, graziers have had to listen to Minister Lynham tell them over and over, 'There is no problem.' Media release after media release has been published telling all and sundry that all was going swimmingly. Minister, if you had bothered to talk with the landowners at the front line, the landowners in the mulga lands, you would hear a completely different story. Landowners would have also had good reason to expect to see the minister for agriculture come to their assistance or, at the very least, show some compassion for the predicament they now find themselves in through no fault of their own. But no, once again Minister Furner has been deathly silent.

The LNP have listened to the very real concerns and impracticalities of this ill-conceived legislation that were highlighted by the member for Burdekin earlier. The proposed codes were never going to work in the first place, but with the worsening drought situation across the state the flaws in these codes have been exacerbated and exposed. Almost 60 per cent of Queensland is now in drought. The western areas are now entering the seventh consecutive failed wet season. This drought has spread its tentacles far and wide through New South Wales and Victoria. This has meant that crop-growing areas have failed to produce any grain, hay or silage. Indeed, grain is being shipped across from Western Australia to the port of Brisbane and then trucked inland to feed livestock. Hay is being trucked over from both South Australia and Western Australia. There is virtually no local product for local producers to source, so they must buy imported grain and hay at very expensive cost.

Cotton seed, which is a great drought supplement, is expensive and now in very short supply. The west always had a valuable source of drought fodder at their disposal for times such as these: mulga. They still do. It is there on their properties ready to be utilised, as it has many, many times before. That is, until the Palaszczuk government introduced these draconian vegetation management laws. The mayor of Paroo Shire Council, Lindsay Godfrey, stated—

Mulga is one of the reliable tools we have for a lot of the area to get us through droughts, the more you push it down the more it grows.

The amendments under this code have made the harvesting of mulga a nightmare for producers. The layers of paperwork, which were displayed by the member for Burdekin earlier, and the GPS coordinates needed to apply for permission to harvest mulga are driving many producers to despair. One producer told me that he believes the current regulations are aimed at slowing people down. He said—

It gives us more time-consuming work to do at a time when we do not have any spare time. Why do we need to take photos of the uncleared and cleared areas when Minister Lynham was bragging that they can see all the evidence of what is going on from satellite imagery. We have to keep letting them—

the government—

know, draw the next area that we are going to harvest, and then use the online mapping tool which is painful and hard to interpret.

Another landowner stated in an email—

Another problem we have is that we are not allowed to push mulga only in one area—we have two blocks and are told that we have to spread the clearing of mulga over both blocks. Therefore, we have to transport the machine which causes lots of wear-and-tear due to dust on the track.

This is creating cases where the only mulga that can be harvested is a long way from the nearest water, as many dams are now dry. A landowner stated—

A major issue that I have on my place is the fact that the cover and density of mulga stands can be quite varied. If I push a stand that has much lower cover, I am still restricted to the 500-hectare total area. For instance, in thicker stands the feed value is 100 per cent; another stand which has medium cover is 50 per cent; whereas low-density stands may have 25 per cent. This 500-hectare limit approach is going to lean us towards pushing thicker clumps.

The problem with the 500-hectare limit and strips is that in many cases it is impracticable. As one landowner said—

We are pushing 300 hectares in a fortnight, so we are needing to renotify continually on a fortnightly basis or shorter. I need at least five hours in my office complying with the notification process and another hour or so in the paddock to mark our GPS marker points.

While permits are being processed, it is a very slow process. As Mayor Lindsay Godfrey said—

People are in a drought, most people are struggling, people don't have time to go and start reading up on these laws and making submissions.

The problem with the 500-hectare area limit and remnant strips is that in many cases it is impracticable. The previous code allowed for clearing up to 135-metre strips for fodder harvesting. This code has reduced that to 50 metres for fodder and then a 75-metre strip that must be left standing. This means that landowners can only harvest less than half of that 500-hectare limit. Landowners speak of driving a bulldozer with a mobile phone in one hand, trying to stay in the grid pattern while pushing mulga, navigating around mature trees, gullies, jump-ups and other obstacles.

As someone who has spent many thousands of hours managing regrowth on a bulldozer, I know full well the impracticalities that these landowners are facing. These landowners are well aware of the penalties that will be imposed upon them if they happen to breach these guidelines. This is particularly concerning given the admission by the Herbarium during the committee process about the inaccuracy of the SLATS mapping.

The removal of the thinning code and the tightening of the fodder code have come at the worst possible time for those in the mulga lands. At a time when most are struggling to keep their livestock alive and look after their own mental health, the imposition of these unworkable codes is the last thing they need. We are now in spring, and there will soon be calves on the ground, adding extra pressure on keeping fodder up to the hungry stock. Minister Lynham needs to stop issuing misleading media statements and go and talk to the landowners who are paying the price for these ill-conceived laws. It is time for the minister to stop playing politics on this issue. It is time to admit that he has got this one wrong.

Whilst there are many other issues that I have with this vegetation management legislation, the codes surrounding mulga are the worst example and are the most pressing. This has now become an animal welfare issue, because of this legislation. It does not need to be. The solution to this is simple: go out and meet with the landowners in the mulga lands. Many have lived there all their lives. They value the mulga, they value their livestock and they value their lifestyle. Their knowledge of the mulga lands is invaluable. The answer lies with them, not the bureaucrats. The minister must act and act now.