




Speech By
Peter Russo
MEMBER FOR TOOHEY

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VEGETATION MANAGEMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr RUSSO** (Toohey—ALP) (11.42 am): I rise in the House to support the passing of the Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I believe that we are on the same page as those opposite, because we are both concerned about doing two things: protecting farms for the future of Queensland and protecting farms for the future of our children. I understand that the opposition is concerned about what will happen to people in relation to their land rights. Coming from Italian heritage, I well understand that connection, but there are times when we need laws to ensure that we are good corporate citizens, and the Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill is exactly that.

When the Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy introduced the bill to the House on 8 March 2018, he made the following comments which I will adopt in my short contribution to the debate. The Labor government has a long and proud history of delivering nation-leading reforms in vegetation management dating back to the introduction of the original vegetation management laws in 1999. It was a Labor government that 14 years ago put an end to broadscale clearing of remnant vegetation here in Queensland. Those reforms delivered the largest single reduction in greenhouse gas emissions in Australia's history and allowed the then Howard government to tell the Australian people that we had met our international commitments under the Kyoto Protocol.

Those nation-leading reforms came to an end in 2013 when the LNP set about removing the protections that the Labor Party had built over 13 years. The minister went on to say in his introductory speech that the bill will reinstate the protection of high-value regrowth vegetation on freehold and Indigenous land. The bill will change the definition of high-value regrowth to ensure that additional vegetation that has significant environmental value is protected. This aligns with scientific advice that has been provided.

In the final paragraph of the minister's introductory speech the minister said that he believed this bill and the complementary measures that have been outlined will deliver on the election commitment to deliver a more sustainable vegetation management framework for Queensland. This government will continue to work with our vital agricultural sector so that together we can care for the environment and ensure that their farms can pass in good condition and in safe hands from generation to generation.

I will now turn to the background of what occurred in 2013. The Liberal National Party government made amendments to the vegetation management framework which allowed broadscale clearing for high-value and irrigated high-value agricultural development. The opposition removed high-value regrowth protections on freehold and Indigenous land and introduced self-assessable vegetation clearing codes. Also in 2013 the Water Act 2000 riverine protection provisions were amended to remove the consideration of native vegetation clearing in a watercourse, lake or spring.

In 2015 the Queensland Labor government made an election commitment to protect the Great Barrier Reef and reduce Queensland's carbon emissions by reinstating nation-leading vegetation protection laws repealed by the Liberal National Party. Legislation was subsequently introduced into

parliament in the first quarter of 2016. Unfortunately, those laws were defeated in the Legislative Assembly. The government has recommitted to end broadscale clearing in Queensland as outlined in the Labor Party's 2017 policy document.

It is difficult to see how the LNP can deny what science has been telling us for years—that is, large-scale land clearing has an impact on the environment. Queensland has a huge responsibility to protect the Great Barrier Reef. Changes in the environment brought about by the warming of the planet, coral bleaching and the threat of the crown-of-thorns to the Great Barrier Reef have all been traced back to climate change. Many conservation groups have documented this change. Floods in North Queensland have meant that silt build-up on the reef causes damage to the reef. Run-off from our river system damages the Great Barrier Reef.

This legislation when passed in this parliament will provide protection to the Great Barrier Reef and also ensure that our state has a viable agricultural industry into the future. The level of clearing that has taken place in Queensland since 2013 is unsustainable and not in the public interest in terms of protecting remnant vegetation, reducing carbon emissions and protecting the Great Barrier Reef. The Palaszczuk Labor government recognises the importance of agriculture to the state's economy. It is important to be aware that a range of opportunities will still exist for rural and agricultural development. I commend the bill to the House.