




Speech By
Ray Stevens

MEMBER FOR MERMAID BEACH

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VEGETATION MANAGEMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr STEVENS** (Mermaid Beach—LNP) (3.08 pm): I rise to speak to what should be renamed the vegetation management and re-elect the left-wing member for South Brisbane bill. This bill would not be before this House in the 56th Parliament for consideration if the Katter party and One Nation had not preferenced Labor in certain seats because then Labor would not have the numbers and members such as the member for Hinchinbrook would not be in the position where they have to vote against this Labor Party bill. Similar legislation was introduced in the 55th Parliament but was voted down, as we are well aware. Now with the government's hubris and arrogance, given its numbers in this House, it can push anything it wants through and in this particular case it has sought retribution on the farmers throughout the state. What we are seeing now is a result of that disastrous election result, particularly in the north, which will affect many of those people who rallied outside this place yesterday.

Some might ask: why is the member for Mermaid Beach talking about vegetation clearing? I will tell members a little story about a young lad—I will not say good looking, but he was a very fit and active young lad—of about 14 or 15 and every morning he would go out on his property with his dad, who had a big Solo chainsaw. This young lad was managing a much smaller McCulloch—a little yellow and black one—that used to go like the blazers. They would go out and cut down whitewood trees on their property of 60,000 acres north-east of Richmond and the sheep would follow them around. It was in a complete drought area and that was the only feed for the sheep, particularly in November and December.

They would be doing that all day to keep those sheep alive and then the next week or two they would be cutting down pink gidgee in the gidgee scrubs that are well and truly up in the north, and members would know about those mainly because we were told that they were better fence posts than black gidgee. They had long, hard days with the chainsaw cutting those trees down. That kid of course happened to be me and all of those things now are under threat. We would be out there toiling away trying to keep our sheep alive and trying to make improvements on our property, yet under this legislation a departmental officer can now jump straight out of the scrub and say, 'Here's a \$200,000 fine, mate.'

That is what this legislation is all about and it is for purely political purposes. This is a very favourable topic in South-East Queensland, as we are aware, and in my electorate of Mermaid Beach there has been a lot of input from people who are on our side of politics. Well, they told me they voted for me and they always tell the truth to their local member! They are very concerned about the propaganda that has been put out in support of this bill to make the people on the other side of the House feel good, and all of them earned their vegetation management stripes in union offices and ministerial offices as apprentices and know a heap about vegetation and land clearing. Some of them are lucky to get across the Great Divide in terms of seeing what it is really like to work on the land and how hard it is. As a matter of fact, it was so hard that that is why I ended up on the Gold Coast, which has been a good paddock.

This bill will be passed. I understand the numbers that the government has to push anything it wants through in this parliament, but that is quite sad given that earlier in the week the Premier spoke about how wonderful it was that she had been in Winton with all of those highly respected people such as Mayor John Wharton of Richmond at the Waltzing Matilda Centre opening. It is a wonderful thing for the Waltzing Matilda Centre to be open—it is fantastic—but Mr John Wharton, the Mayor of Richmond, was in the cafe at lunchtime. I can assure members that he and all of the other folk out there believe that this legislation is a load of rubbish and the reasons behind it are not the reason the Great Barrier Reef is being ruined.

From the Richmond region all the way down to the electorate of the member for Gympie, that is not going to ruin the Great Barrier Reef. We all love the Great Barrier Reef and it is a wonderful catchcry to say, 'Save the reef.' In fact, I think we should probably put up a new party that preferences the LNP called 'Save the Barrier Reef Party'. I think I have 500 members already lined up and they will preference the LNP at the next election under the compulsory preferential voting that those opposite brought in to further their own interests at the last election.

This is a political stunt in that this legislation will not change the outcomes on the Great Barrier Reef given what David Attenborough has said, and I do not think that anyone opposite is questioning David Attenborough in terms of what he says about the condition of the reef now after thousands of years. It was here a long time before we got here. A long time before white man was here the Indigenous people were here and they were burning scrub throughout the area for their hunting and collecting habits. Tree clearing has been going on for a long time. In fact, I would remind everyone in this House who lives in a house or a unit that their block of land was covered in trees before a house was put on it.

Those opposite want to sit in this House and say to those who are working a business and producing and being responsible given their care and consideration for tree clearing on their properties that they cannot do that without this rigmarole of a bureaucratic nightmare and that, basically, there is a brick wall up on clearing in terms of furthering their agricultural interests. I also remind everyone in the House that at the committee meetings the Indigenous people expressed serious concerns and total disappointment at these laws hobbling any farming interests that they may have in their areas, and I do not know why we are picking on Indigenous people in this era when we are trying to make good for some of the mistakes of the past. We should be listening to them and doing everything we can to assist our Indigenous people in all matters. They are saying that this tree-clearing bill is a load of rubbish.

One thing that springs to mind during my career relating to tree clearing is when I was a councillor on the Albert shire, which happened to oversee the complete flattening of a very large area on the Gold Coast next to the highway called Studio Village. The greater public of the Gold Coast and Brisbane went ballistic as it was right next to the highway and very visible and pretty much every tree was flattened. The terminology used at the time was that we turned it into a moonscape in the development of Studio Village. That is a thriving community today and well represented by the member for Theodore. At that time people on the Gold Coast did not understand that those trees had to be cleared and completely flattened to put in all of the services such as the roads, the pipes and all the rest of it so that our generation could enjoy the wonderful residential amenities on the Gold Coast.

This bill is a complete farce in that it is a complete political play to the green vote in certain areas. I am totally disappointed about the effect that it will have on those farmers who are great contributors to our economy and to our community and who just want to get on with the job. I will be more than happy and very pleased to vote against this bill.