




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TRAEGER

Record of Proceedings, 2 May 2018

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (3.18 pm): I want to start my contribution to this debate by congratulating the environmental lobby groups for doing a great job in convincing the government that it is helping the environment by introducing this bill. Unfortunately, the government forgot to talk to many people on the ground. The environment does not manage itself. People interact with it and manage it and maintain it. Since white settlers have moved onto this land, we have had an impact on the environment and it needs to be maintained and managed.

In the process of formulating this bill, the government forgot to talk to those people who manage the land. The environmental outcomes that we all desire—I think it is a legitimate desire to want to save the reef and get environmental outcomes and we would all agree with that—cannot be achieved if the government is not talking and interacting with and taking advice from the people who are on the ground. That is a very unfortunate and regrettable part of this bill. This bill removes provisions relating to high-value agriculture and irrigated high-value agriculture.

In this day and age I would say that, when Victoria, New South Wales and the southern areas of Queensland were developed, the early settlers should have left a bit more forest in some areas, but that development has been done. As settlers moved further into Central Queensland, I would probably agree with most of the development that took place. There might be areas that, regrettably, were not done properly. Up in the north, we have hardly had a chance to do anything. Up in the gulf and the cape, 98 per cent is remnant forest. We are at a stage now where we can develop a little bit of that area. We could ask the government, 'Can we have just one or two per cent for a bit of development work?' Members would be surprised by the difference that would make but, under this legislation, that would be denied. The sad fact is that people in the north are denied the opportunity for entrepreneurship and, in some areas, are denied the opportunity to maintain their businesses.

This bill increases penalty offence units for noncompliance and enforces undertakings with a new compliance tool. That is going to make it a lot tougher for people. It will expand the powers of authorised officers by allowing them to enter properties and monitor compliance. There are also amendments to thinning and encroachment permits. I think it is important to detail what those amendments will do and address the science in layman's terms.

During this debate many members have invoked the Great Barrier Reef. We all want to keep the Great Barrier Reef healthy. That is a very worthwhile cause. None of us have a mortgage on that. I find it curious that 75 per cent of Queensland falls outside the catchment of the Great Barrier Reef. Why on earth are we applying the same metrics west of the Great Dividing Range, where water flows into the gulf or Lake Eyre? Surely, those areas should be treated differently. If this bill is all about saving the reef, should we not give separate consideration to those areas west of the Great Dividing Range? This bill does not, because it is not about science or the proper management of the Great Barrier Reef.

When this issue was last debated I read some of the literature that was being farmed out that talked about how bad the situation was. Boulia shire was included in that literature as an area of concern. I am sure a lot of people are aware of where Boulia is located. It borders the Simpson Desert. I will joke like I did the last time this matter was debated and say that in Boulia people would run out of diesel driving from one tree to another, yet Boulia is caught up in an area of concern.

The point I am making is that there are great anomalies in the science. Yes, sometimes the science works really well—it is a good tool to use—but even the department acknowledges that there are big gaps in it, often to the detriment of the farmer, or the person who is putting in his applications. In my experience, too many times the department errs on the side of caution and says, 'We probably should give you 80 per cent of the area but we are just going to give you 20 per cent, because we think we should.'

During this debate many members have mentioned Dr Bill Burrows. We want to embark on the journey of trying to best manage the environment, but where the rubber hits the road is where man is interacting with the environment. Where these activities occur, how are we going to restrict them? Do we have any professionals who have worked in that area who can give us some advice? Luckily, we do. Dr Bill Burrows has spent 30 or 40 years—working for the taxpayer—studying these rangelands. We have a great opportunity to tap into his knowledge, yet he has contradicted what this government says this bill will achieve. He says that this bill is not the answer, that this bill will not help.

If I were trying to address this environmental issue, the next port of call for me would be the NRM groups because they interact with people on the ground. They give advice to people on how to best manage their land. Yet they are saying, 'We weren't consulted.' Yes, they put in submissions, but would the government not go to them first and ask, 'How do we make this happen? How can we best control these issues that we want to address?' Those NRM groups say that this bill will make the situation worse. One would think, 'That can't be right.' I am sure the government must ask that question.

I will give members an example. I am almost getting tired of going to properties to see people who say to me, 'Rob, have a look at this country. This is where we have selectively cleared. We have cleared the scrub under this area and there is all the grass growth. That slows down the water and it is absorbed in the soil. Here is an area that we have not been able to clear.' All the scrub there has proliferated. That is usually a harbour for pests and vermin, because we are not controlling that throughout the state very well. That is where the ground goes hard, the water rushes over it and starts gouging and rushing down into the waterways. It seems that, when farmers are not allowed to maintain those areas, the exact opposite is achieved. This bill discourages farmers from maintaining those areas or imposes provisions that make it too hard to maintain them. In that way, I think this bill is really counterproductive.

There are many other anomalies in this bill. Another issue relates to Cape York and the gulf, but the same rationale could be applied to any cattle station operator who is not allowed to grow hay. A lot of big cattle station operators do not want to be farmers. They do not want to farm tens of thousands of acres of hay. A lot of those cattle station operators, particularly in the north, just want to use one or two per cent of their cattle station to grow hay. Their properties could span a million acres, and they want to use only 1,000 acres of that to grow hay. People would not even see that area if they were flying over it in a commercial jet. If those operators were able to bale some hay, that would help them during hard times. They could feed their weaners and not have to buy in hay.

Now, they are buying in hay from all over Queensland and exactly the same has happened to them as has happened in my little horse paddock at home. I am getting weeds such as goathead that never used to be there because I am buying in hay. When we buy in hay, we start bringing in the weeds. If that occurs throughout the cape and the gulf, that is a bigger problem. Again, there are so many anomalies in what the government is trying to do through this bill. If the government does not consult the right people, it will not get the outcomes that it is after. Unfortunately, people are then misled. People think we have these good environmental outcomes when that is not true.

Queensland has different bioregions. There is even a big difference between the bioregion of the gulf and the bioregion of the cape. The Brigalow Belt and southern Queensland are different, yet under this bill similar metrics are being applied. It does not make sense that different areas would be treated the same. Again, I refer to that area west of the Great Dividing Range.

I also want to make the point that was made by the member for Mermaid Beach in his contribution. The first Australians used to light up the country all the time. It is a well-known fact that they cleared all the undergrowth. That would let all trees grow into a big, nice tall forest. All the scrub was cleared out. When white man came and developed the land, they did the same. In the early days there were not firebreaks, roads, or rural fire brigades, so big fires would be lit.

They would start at Normanton or Karumba and they would go all the way across the gulf burning everything. That kept down a lot of the scrub. That allowed the big trees to grow bigger and there were nice tidy forests. Most of us would look at those forests and say, 'That's beautiful. What a great environmental outcome.' That does not happen anymore. Mechanical harvesting is used to maintain areas. Some people say, 'That's terrible,' but that is what has always happened. That is what has been used to create the natural environment in those areas.

The member for Kawana was one member of the LNP who said that KAP preferences got Labor into government. For a start, that is misleading parliament. I think they are trying to hide the fact that in this press release—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Kelly): Is that a document that you want to table?

Mr KATTER: I want to table this press release. It is from 2003 and in it the Liberals skite about Queensland needing to act on a land clearing moratorium in Queensland. Dr Kemp is saying, 'We are proud'—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Will you table the document, please?

Mr KATTER: He is saying, 'We're proud we've acted on this and now it is time for Peter Beattie and Labor to act in Queensland.' The LNP members have dirty hands as well. They should not try to blame the KAP for things. I acknowledge that, when they were in government, they put in amending legislation. It was good legislation. The LNP members have played a role in this as well and they know it.

Tabled paper: Transcript, dated 16 May 2003, by the former Federal Minister for the Environment and Heritage, the Hon. David Kemp MP, titled 'Moratorium on Land Clearing in Queensland and Response to Simon Crean's Environment Statement in Budget Reply' [\[594\]](#).

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