




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BONNEY

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VEGETATION MANAGEMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (5.07 pm): I rise today to speak to this legislation as an MP from an urban area which covers approximately five suburbs and takes approximately 10 minutes to traverse by car. This ease of travel is something that my regional colleagues can only dream of. In fact, I believe that it takes my good friend the member for Callide a few hours of driving just to get to his office from home. The closest thing to agricultural land in the area that I represent is likely my plot at the Labrador community garden, where I proudly serve as the vice-president—although admittedly recently I have not tended to it as much as I probably should have.

Not having my constituents directly impacted by changes to vegetation management means that I have to take the word of my regional colleagues and the immense amount of feedback they have received from their constituents. My uncle, Paul Edwards, works the land at my grandfather's gorgeous Kalbar property Yellunga. I will say that I was thoroughly disappointed he did not bring his tractor to the rally this morning as he joked he would over the weekend. Regardless, I asked him what he thought of the laws and in his usual succinct manner he said, 'No good.'

Many other members in this House will see just how disillusioned people are with politics. The flawed and hastily conducted consultation on this bill is certainly something that would have added to that for the predominantly regional communities which have been impacted by these changes. On the other hand, it is extraordinary to hear that over 1,000 people attended the public hearings and over 13,000 submissions were received by the committee—the largest ever received for any inquiry of the Queensland parliament—most speaking against the legislation. It is great to see that so many people were involved in the process, and it is a testament to the great passion people have about these changes. Having hundreds of them outside this place this morning bringing their bush concerns to the big smoke also shows just how important this bill is to their lives and livelihoods.

One of the most ridiculous parts of this legislation is the intention to make every applicant wanting to take control of thickening vegetation to apply for a development approval under the department of state development. One issue highlighted at the Charleville hearing spoke of thinning 400 hectares of a 10,000-hectare property incurring a cost of \$3,000 for submitting the required development application. This morning we heard about the proposed removal of the ability to clear for irrigated high-value agriculture, something that is already highly regulated. This will have to go through the same DA process.

In the last four and a bit years since the LNP's common-sense legislation, only 5,608 hectares or 0.0039 per cent of the area used for agriculture or 0.003 per cent of the total land area of our state has been approved to clear under these regulations. Furthermore, 76 per cent of these were for 30 hectares or less. These are clearly small, highly productive patches of land. The whole point of this is to give farmers flexibility to allow them to have better environmental outcomes, to adapt to a changing climate and to assist in the profitability of their operations. Farmers know just how rare and valuable prime agricultural land is. They are true environmentalists. It is an insult to portray them as the villains. Their land is their life and, as such, they care for it.

This is an attack by Labor on what it perceives as an easy target. There is only one farmer for every 277 Queenslanders—less than half of one per cent of our population. They more than pull their weight, supporting hundreds of thousands of jobs. In fact, Queensland is responsible for a quarter of our nation's agricultural output. I was astounded to see that the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy had not undertaken any modelling in relation to the effect this bill will have on agricultural production and that it does not intend to. How can it not consider the costs of this on agricultural production and on our rural communities? What we do know is that two-thirds of the vegetation management carried out in recent years has been to control regrowth and other standard farm maintenance tasks.

Other concerns with the bill do not relate to this industry. As a young person, one aspect of this legislation that concerns me is the potential impact it may have on housing affordability. This has been outlined by the Property Council of Australia in its submission to the committee. It flags the potential implications of vegetation being mapped as a matter of local environmental significance to local government planning schemes. The examples were given of Brisbane City Council, which generally includes regrowth in its biodiversity overlay general ecological significance areas, and Logan City Council, where offsets are required depending on the type of vegetation and the manner of the clearing. This mapping and how it relates to planning schemes, in its opinion, will significantly impact the extent of development that can be achieved in urban areas. It also flagged that any developments that do occur will do so at an increased cost.

The Urban Development Institute of Australia also stated in its submission that the amendments impact the ability of its members to plan, design and deliver appropriate, diverse and affordable housing for Queenslanders—exactly what many young people are crying out for. Changing the definition of 'regrowth' will lock away significant amounts of land. Strict environmental controls and planning requirements already exist and the changes in this bill will give uncertainty to the urban property market in the south-east. We do not want to see future developments across Queensland impeded in this way.

People want to live here and they want to live in the south-east. Hundreds of thousands of people will move here and be born here over the coming decades, and who can blame them? We need to make sure that this bill does not make the affordable housing that is so desperately needed harder for them to obtain. I hope that I have added to the concerns of other speakers to illustrate the impact that these laws will have. They mean more than just a potential increase in the price of smashed avo on toast from one of Chirn Park's fabulous cafes, although this is a very important consideration.