




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MIRANI

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VEGETATION MANAGEMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr ANDREW** (Mirani—PHON) (6.25 pm): I have been a little bit stunned today to hear the reef mentioned so many times. The headwaters of the beautiful Pioneer River, which runs through the Mackay electorate, start in the electorate of Mirani, and 1.2 or 1.3 nautical miles from the mouth of that river there is a little reef called Reichelmann's reef. Just off that reef, as you probably do not know, we catch 600-millimetre red emperor right in front of the Pioneer River. I think everyone knows that the Pioneer River has farms along it, from the beginning right to the end. The only part that does not is the part in Mackay itself.

The Pioneer River is the only blue river up and down the coast. Members will see the river when the government visits Mackay as it governs from the regions. Members who fly from Brisbane to Mackay will see the difference between the rivers running through those two cities. With this in mind, and knowing what goes on with the reef and how healthy the ecosystems surrounding the reef are, I oppose this 2018 vegetation management bill.

The previous government and Mackay Sugar got together and pledged \$44 million to build a railroad for sugar, and that railroad leads all the way down to Carmilla in my electorate. It is all high-value agricultural land. The member for Mackay has recently spoken about biofuels, and I know that the government put out a paper in 2015 with regard to cleaner energy. This paper talks about biofuels, and that railway line and all of the infrastructure that was put in by the ALP government and Mackay Sugar will stand there and go begging. It is not going to be used. It is just so sad that we have all that infrastructure put in place.

I am confused about which way we want to go with this. The government wants to go one way at one time, and then it wants to turn the whole thing around because something else has changed and it suits them. There are a lot of stakeholders who would like to contribute towards biofuels. I know there was talk about jet fuel for the US Navy, Army and Air Force. There are so many things we could be doing. An AgForce member has penned an open letter to the Queensland Premier which states—

Dear Ms Palaszczuk:

Remember when your people invited yourselves out to our property last year? You were passing through our small farming town to visit striking miners in a nearby town. Your publicity team thought it would be a great opportunity for you to put on an Akubra hat and hold a baby. We put on a lovely smoko for you and your team in our machinery shed. Do you remember us? Remember the 'exporting chickpeas to India' conversation? Remember asking us how we could export more chickpea? Remember asking how we can get more chickpea in the ground? You asked if the problem was that there was not enough land. Do you remember the response you got from a second-generation farmer? 'There's plenty of land. We could plant plenty of chickpea, but we need to clear some of that land.' Do you remember how quickly you shut down that conversation?

It was amazing to us that you even let yourself get into a pickle like that. Maybe you were having an off day, or maybe you just don't have a clue about any of it. Either way, we remember. We remember that little publicity stunt. We remember your team taking all the smoko with you when you left to give at your next publicity stunt. I bet you didn't tell them that the food had come from the farmers either. I bet you didn't care that the farmers had provided you with that smoko. Thank you for that day. Thank

you for reminding us why we make the choices we do when it comes to voting time. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to give you a chance and thank you for letting us down, because it shows us that we do make the right decisions with our vote. How can you have gotten it so incredibly wrong?

Yours sincerely,

Just a farmer's wife.

In my maiden speech I stated that city and country areas are different and they have their own unique requirements. How can a city Labor MP dictate to farmers and rural families about their future viability? This legislation will only devalue the farms of many Queenslanders. It will limit farmers' incomes. It may force farmers to take their own lives, and that is a conversation that I have had. There is only one word that can describe the ALP's actions—bullying. I will say it again: it is a form of bullying.

At the moment there is another problem that has been discovered that probably takes precedence over what is going on with land clearing and the Vegetation Management Act. I bring to the attention of the House the buffel dieback that is going on right now. It is threatening all agriculture right across Queensland.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Stewart): Member for Mirani, are you prepared to table that document?

Mr ANDREW: Yes, I will table that document. It is a report.

Tabled paper: Document, titled 'Buffel Dieback Landholder Survey Summary Report', Dr Gerry Roberts, GR Consulting, October 2017 Draft V1 [603].

This problem is being found in the reef catchments and the rivers west of Roma which is the southern-flowing catchment. The problem seems to be random in where it first appears in paddocks and properties. It does not seem to be shifted by vehicles, as it usually does not start near tracks. It is the same with cattle in that it does not start near cattle pads or tracks. In fact, these sometimes seem to halt the spread for a short time before however it starts to shift across the barrier and then it continues spreading. Some of the grass species that the problem has appeared in are buffel, bisset, hatch, bluegrass, green panic, pangola, urochloa, rhodes grass and some native grass. It is still unknown what it is doing—that is, whether it is a fungus or insect pest or viral or a microbial disease.

This is a very serious issue, yet I have not heard anyone speak about how this could be damaging for vegetation management going forward. In six months paddocks that were previously good strong grass pastures with high cattle production can be turned into paddocks of weeds with very low cattle production without the operator overgrazing or drought being a cause. In fact, the more conservative the grazing management the more likely it will turn up in your paddock. It is a real threat to us.

The electorate of Mirani is in a pretty unique position as the sugar capital of Queensland. There are billions of dollars of industry that has huge potential for growth and diversification. Sensible and sustainable vegetation management policy is required so that farmers can manage their properties and businesses effectively, but I, like many others in the electorate of Mirani, oppose the changes which inhibit the ability of farmers to grow their business or manage regrowth vegetation.

Canegrowers and sugarcane farmers in coastal Queensland have been developing science driven best management practice programs to ensure productivity and profitability on the farm as well as ensuring environmental stewardship. Evidence of this is visible within the development of constructed wetlands and recycling pits as sediment and nutrient traps as well as significantly reducing chemical and fertiliser inputs across the whole industry. This is well supported by engagement in the Reef Rescue program and the uptake of chemical and chemical training nutrient programs, including Six Easy Steps nutrient management.

The Queensland government promotes the need for increased agricultural production to feed the growing world population and has identified sugar cane as a critical feedstock for the new biofutures industry, including renewable energy and the jobs and the economic activity they can create. However, the proposed amendments will jeopardise the industry's ability to expand and evolve to achieve those goals.

Just last year the government invested \$1.6 million for the future of bioenergy in Mackay and surrounding areas. What happened to that? The sugarcane industry is the economic and social backbone of coastal Queensland. The vast majority—87 per cent—of sugar cane grown in Queensland occurs within the catchments adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The economic return and the job creation derived from clearing high-value agriculture or irrigated high-value agricultural land is incredibly high compared to the amount of land cleared. For example, the wholesale value of sugar cane is over \$5,000 per hectare and in some districts can be as high as two or three times this value.

Many rural and regional communities rely on the considerable returns from these high-value industries for their economic wellbeing. The sugarcane industry provides relatively high direct and indirect employment throughout the growing and milling activities and the relatively small footprint we maintain.

(Time expired)