




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

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VEGETATION MANAGEMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr NICHOLLS** (Clayfield—LNP) (4.04 pm): It is indeed opportune that the Premier found time, limited as it might be, to come into this House to try to defend the actions of a government that cares little or nothing for the rights of farmers or people on the land. The Premier comes in here and the whole Labor government comes in here and pretends that they respect people on the land. They pretend that they respect the farmers. We just heard the Premier say, 'This does not mean that we do not respect the farmers. We do respect the farmers.' With this legislation they are saying, 'We respect you so much we won't let you do what you want to do on your own land. We don't trust you to manage your own land. We are going to send in the green police and if you don't let them in we are going to fine you hundreds of thousands of dollars.' That is how much the Premier and the Labor Party and the Minister for Agriculture respect the people on this land. That is exactly what they are doing.

They say that there is no land-clearing vegetation protection legislation in place. That is completely wrong. They behave as though the farmers, the landowners, the graziers, the pastoralists wake up every morning at five o'clock, have a cup of tea, crank up the bikes, grab the chainsaws, get the bulldozer drivers and go out and clear the land. That is what they think happens. That is what they think, other than the fact that there is widespread protection for vegetation in Queensland and has been for a lengthy period of time.

I heard them talk about the legislation in 2004 and the votes that took place in 2004. What they do not talk about, though, is the next step they took in 2006 with the remnant vegetation and the regrowth vegetation more particularly when they made it harder for pastoralists to maintain their property, not to clear it but to deal with the regrowth—the gidgee, the mulga and the other acacias that in the space of three years can grow quite high. They will not talk about that. What they will not talk about is the dirty deal that was done by Peter Beattie in 2006 for Greens votes. They will not talk about that deal. The member for Currumbin remembers that deal that was done in the weeks before the election with the wild rivers and the regrowth vegetation. Some of us remember it. We remember it. I stood up in this place as the newly elected member for Clayfield and I proudly stood beside my friend the then new member for Hinchinbrook, Andrew Cripps, and said, 'This is an intrusion on people's rights.' I stood up and I am a member from the inner city. I stood up for people's private property rights.

Importantly, what do we have here now? What we have in respect of this legislation and what is being proposed, at its essence, is a deep philosophical question. There is a deep philosophical issue at stake here. The philosophical issue is the ever-increasing intrusion of the state, particularly under Labor governments—but parties and governments from both sides have tended to do it—into the private businesses of individuals and the private businesses of companies. It is the Labor intrusion of saying, 'We know better than you. We know better than you how to manage your land, despite the fact that your family have been on it for 100, 120 or 150 years. We know better than you how to run your business, despite the fact that you have been in business, you have been paying wages, you have been paying taxes'—taxes that these leeches feed off, passing it on and on and on—

Mr Power: Tim, you don't want to be leader again.

Mr NICHOLLS: Mate, you will never be there, so do not worry about that.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Weir): Order! Can we have a bit of quiet in the House please?

Mr NICHOLLS: That is a race you do not even want to start, old boy. You are not even in it. You are not at the starting line—couldn't get it up.

Mr Bailey: You didn't last three years.

Mr NICHOLLS: As for the member here, old 'Cut and Run'—when he could not get the chairmanship of the planning committee of the Brisbane City Council, he packed up and left his car behind and went off to the bush. He went and found himself in the bush.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Clayfield, I ask for some quiet in the House and we will get back to the vegetation management bill.

Mr NICHOLLS: It has been a little time, Mr Deputy Speaker. One cannot help responding to foolishness wherever it shows itself, and it shows itself most particularly on the Labor side of the fence.

It is a deeper philosophical question that we have to deal with here today because it is not just this piece of legislation. Under this Labor government, it will not be just this one piece of legislation, as important as this piece of legislation is. It will be the ever-increasing and overweening hand—the dead hand of bureaucracy—coming in and telling private individuals and private businesses how they should live their lives, how they should think, how they should invest their money, how we should educate our children, what we can and cannot say to our children, to our friends and in the workplace. This is overwhelmingly the way of Labor governments.

It is not today a question of city versus country because that question when raised in this place is always a false and invidious question. My experience from travelling around this state is that people in the city care deeply about people in the country, and people in the country know of their obligations to people in the city. I have spent a little bit of time over the last couple of months travelling. I have a bit more time on my hands, as people know.

An opposition member interjected.

Mr NICHOLLS: I have been out through various parts of Western Queensland. I have been out through a lot of parts of Queensland and I have spent some time talking to property owners there. These are not people who are rebels. These are not people who are unbelievably upset about all things government. They are reasonable people who want to get on and live their life and do what they have been doing for a lengthy period of time and be given a fair go to do it.

We have had five years of drought. Dalkeith is a property 150 kilometres west of Longreach. I visited that property before Australia Day. Mr M McClymont is from the Dalkeith property and is one of the people who gave evidence. I think he is Mac McClymont.

Mr Stevens interjected.

Mr NICHOLLS: Yes, Malcolm but he is called Mac. Mac is 63 or 64 and that is the property that his parents had as well. They are just putting up the dog fence. They are finally getting some money coming back in. They have just had a little bit of water out there. They got a bit of feed and they are starting to get some sheep back onto that property again. Mr McClymont gave the following evidence—

With the codes, the infrastructure code is very useful—

this is the code that we had in place to allow them to make an application for clearing—

because there is certain essential maintenance work that you have to do—clearing fence lines, firebreaks, what have you—and you can just go ahead and do it.

Avoiding unnecessary paperwork is very important. Not only does it save us a lot of time, but also it saves the department a heap of time.

I got a text from Mac today on another matter and I will be raising that later on. Mac said, 'Tim, good luck today. I'm praying for a miracle but I don't think they're listening to us.' Mac, if you are watching, if you are reading this at some stage, I can tell you, mate, that they are not, and that is the great tragedy of this legislation. We are seeing that intrusion occurring further and further here in Queensland. This government seeks to set up a fight—a city versus country fight—when such a fight is unwarranted.

The question we have to ask ourselves when voting on this legislation today is this: to what extent to salve the conscience of a certain group of people, whether supported by science, evidence or not, do we as parliamentarians intrude and take individuals' rights to exercise their own rights of ownership

away from them? Where does the state stop? Who stands up for the individual against the state? How much state interference do we allow at the behest of some who have nothing at stake, nothing to lose, will also pay no price, will suffer no consequence as a result of this legislation and, importantly, also now enjoy all the benefit of the actions that they seek to stop, regulate and restrict? It is a shallow call to close the gate after they have received the benefit. This legislation should not be supported for those reasons.

(Time expired)