




Speech By  
**Trevor Watts**

**MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH**

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**VEGETATION MANAGEMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (6.13 pm): I rise to make a brief contribution to the debate on the Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018. Later some people from the minor parties will speak to this bill. Those minor parties will have members believe that they are against this legislation. I do not doubt their genuineness in their heart of being against this legislation, but I am very concerned about their actions at the last election. You will find how-to-vote cards that clearly elected many members on the other side, delivering a majority to this Labor government which allows them to move this legislation because, in the words of the minister, ‘we have the numbers’. The reason they have the numbers—

**Mr Knuth** interjected.

**Mr WATTS:** I can hear the member for Hill interjecting. I have seen the how-to-vote cards. The how-to-vote cards clearly indicate that they would prefer a Labor candidate over an LNP candidate. He may well say that on the other side there was a reverse position, and I take that. The facts are that at least 50 per cent of the time the Katter party supported Labor candidates. Those Labor candidates are now members in this place and are using their numbers to pass this legislation. The Katter party has to take responsibility for that.

More important than the Katter party, this morning I saw Pauline out there saying to the farmers, ‘This is terrible.’ I have seen their how-to-vote cards. At least the Katter party had a reverse position on one side for half the time. That was not the case for One Nation. In many seats in Brisbane One Nation caused the outcome to be a Labor member. Now that we have that Labor Party member in parliament, Labor has the numbers to pass this legislation. Those minor parties need to look in the mirror and ask themselves, ‘How deeply do I believe in this legislation?’

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Dr Robinson): Member for Toowoomba North, in terms of your contribution, I remind you of the long title of the bill and I ask you to address the bill more specifically.

**Mr WATTS:** I will now do that, now that I have clearly made the point that the minor parties betrayed the farmers.

The Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018 is very important from many perspectives. One of those perspectives—something that is fundamental to the functioning of our democracy—is property rights. This House must recognise people’s property rights. As soon as this House starts taking away people’s property rights, we find ourselves in a position that is much more akin to Russia or China, where the government will simply ride roughshod over people and take away what was previously marked out as theirs. If you live in Brisbane and you have a title deed over your house—there is a peg on each corner—it says that property belongs to you and you have the right to build a house and an extension and to do this and that. These people—

**Mr Dick:** In accordance with the law.

**Mr WATTS:** That is right: it is a law. Absolutely it is a law.

**Honourable members** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Members will cease interjecting.

**Mr WATTS:** The minister is in here changing the law and stealing people's property rights. People have made an investment in a property—

**Mr Dick** interjected.

**Mr WATTS:** Does the minister deny they have invested in a property?

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for Toowoomba North, if you could take your seat.

**Mr WATTS:** I am more than happy to take the interjection from the minister. Clearly what has happened—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for Toowoomba North, I am on my feet. I warn you and I ask you to pay attention to the chair and to the debate in the House. I remind the minister that when a member has the call and I ask him to cease interjecting he should cease interjecting or he will find himself warned as well.

**Mr WATTS:** I apologise, Mr Deputy Speaker. I saw the other Deputy Speaker coming up and I thought you were getting up for him to take the chair. I apologise. I have great respect for the chair.

We are talking about the property rights of farmers. Say someone gets their money and they invest in property. Let us assume that they have invested in some mulga scrub so they can drought proof their property in the future, so they have some feed for their stock in drought times. That is a good investment to make, particularly if they need to keep the breeding herd alive as the tough times come. This is exactly the story as it was told to me this morning out the front as I was talking to a farmer. They have invested their money in some mulga scrub ready for them to be able to manage the regrowth of that mulga, which takes about seven years for them to be able to clear and use it as feedstock in a drought. This legislation will stop them being able to do that. This legislation will see animals starve. This legislation will devalue their block.

Let us look at what happens when we devalue people's property. The rates base for local governments is fundamentally founded on the valuation of a property. If a person's property is less productive, the valuation of their property must go down. When the valuation of a property goes down, the council's rate base will go down. When the council's rate base goes down, its roads will start to go to rack and ruin and many other things will start to fall apart in that area. The simple facts are that if people in country areas cannot make a profit from their investment they will no longer be able to stay there. They will either go broke—and we heard earlier about some mental health issues that are developing in the bush where people have been put under pressure by drought. Let us hope that nobody goes down those lines. I ask everybody to seek serious mental help if they have any of those feelings.

The simple facts are that if people's investment goes down in value and they cannot stay there and make a living they will have to leave the area. When they leave the area, they will remove their income along with the opportunity for other people in the area by taking their family with them and no longer buying their groceries or going to the shops in that area. There are lots of potential bad outcomes here. The time in which to speak is very short. I apologise because a lot of other issues need to be brought up, and I know other members have brought them up also.

One of the things that struck me is that if we manage vegetation at the rate we did in 2016, which was 0.23 per cent of the Queensland land mass, most of which was regrowth, it will take 410 years to get back to the beginning. Even if it were being managed on that time scale—and I am no expert; I am certainly not someone who knows how quickly trees grow—the fact of the matter is we are talking about 410 years. If land is managed at the rate it was in 2015-16, it seems like that would be long enough for some new trees to grow. In terms of the clearing not being sustainable, that does not make sense because the tree will have grown, seeded, died, grown again, seeded again. The cycle will have been completed three, four or five times before it is time to clear that block even if it is managed at the rate that it was in 2015-16. It is crazy to start saying, 'No, we're going to end up with some barren desert.' What we will end up with is really poor biodiversity because we will have woody weeds popping up all over the place.

We have heard others talk about how absolutely useless the science is in measuring this growth. I can tell honourable members a brief story from some time ago when the same department was using satellite imaging to talk about someone affecting vegetation in their area. It was a vineyard that this person's grandfather had planted. Guess what happens to a vineyard in winter? That is right; the leaves fall off the trees. There was no clearing, but the department was convinced he had cleared the land, but he had not. The simple facts are that this needs to be ground truth science. If the government says that this area contains these kinds of vegetation, then go and have a look. If it is full of prickly acacia, lantana and other woody weeds, let them clear it because we do not need that stuff.

The last thing I want to mention very briefly is that police have less access to criminal activity on private land. They have to go through a more rigorous process to go and check out the bikies and other people who might have committed serious offences such as sexual offences. They have to go and get a warrant to go onto that land. This legislation will give officers of the department the ability to just wander on and wander off people's land without any real checks and balances in place. I think that is a very dangerous precedent. Not only are we stealing their property rights; we are stealing their investment, we are stealing the land off their children and its productive nature and we are also treating them like criminals, and farmers are not criminals. They feed us. Cha Cha Char steaks come from the Darling Downs. I recommend that members take a trip out west, have a look at what they are talking about and consider rejecting this bill.

*(Time expired)*