




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR WARREGO

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VEGETATION MANAGEMENT (CLEARING FOR RELEVANT PURPOSES) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms LEAHY** (Warrego—LNP) (6.53 pm): I rise to speak to the Vegetation Management (Clearing for Relevant Purposes) Amendment Bill 2018. We heard earlier the LNP will not be opposing this bill. The Palaszczuk-Trad Labor vegetation management changes have knocked the confidence from landholders, increased their paperwork and restricted their activities during drought—and that drought has been ongoing for eight years in some areas. This is why we are having this debate. Labor's laws are designed to demonise our hardworking farmers who have been putting the food on our table and the fibre on our backs.

Labor's vegetation management laws have proved to be a brutal, unprovoked attack on farmers, their families and the farming communities right across Queensland including in my electorate. The prolonged drought has made the impacts of these additional restrictions on the farmers in my electorate even greater. Labor's laws have had the effect of aggravating drought conditions by drawing more moisture from the soil. They have increased the number of trees and that has also increased the severity of the drought. Across my electorate we are now seeing large areas of trees and mulga dying from the drought because they were choking themselves out of moisture. Where mulga and trees are too thick they are dying, and they are dying in large areas. These areas actually need to be thinned so that vegetation and trees can survive.

Managing mulga is not land clearing. It is about a regeneration process of the mulga trees and those mulga trees also happen to be a very good fodder source for stock. Unfortunately, we saw Labor's changes that removed the high-value agriculture and the irrigated high-value agriculture for clearing purposes. In my electorate during this drought I have had numerous constituents crying out for the high-value agriculture opportunities and the small irrigated high-value agriculture permits. Just having the opportunity to grow some silage would mean so much during this drought. It would help them to keep their core breeding stock alive without having to purchase fodder, in many cases from interstate. I have farmers who are purchasing fodder from as far away as Victoria and South Australia. The cost of the freight is the same cost as the load of fodder.

Labor have also introduced a development application process for which the DA fee is some \$3,500. How many of these development approvals under this legislation have been successful? I am advised there have not been very many. Labor's laws amended the definition of high-value regrowth to be vegetation that has not been cleared for 15 years from the current 29 years, locking up almost half a million hectares of agricultural land. This was a very sneaky restriction. This is what young landholders in the Augathella area in my electorate tell me in relation to how they have been restricted by these changes by the Labor government. They said—

My great grandfather purchased 20,000 acres of trees, it was considered lower grade country. He had a vision just like we do now.

Two generations later that area is now a productive buffel property turning off over 2,500 feeder cattle a year.

It also supports a huge biodiversity of fauna and flora, I challenge anyone to find the same in a national park/state forest.

Why can't we have the same opportunity?

Why can they not have the same opportunity their grandfather did? That is what landholders in my electorate are saying about the Palaszczuk-Trad vegetation management laws; they are highly disappointed and they feel highly restricted.

Labor's laws removed the area management plan that provided an alternative approval system for vegetation clearing under the Vegetation Management Act 1999 that takes into account particular vegetation categories and regional ecosystems in a given bioregion, geographic area, district or property location. Labor's anti-farmer laws removed the ability to self-assess for mulga clearing and harvesting and added a slow, bureaucratic, red-tape process. The Labor government might say that their approvals are now in place for two years, but what good is an approval for two years when the stock have actually eaten that fodder in the last two weeks?

Landholders are finding themselves having to do multiple permit applications so that they have sufficient mulga to keep their stock alive during this prolonged drought because nobody knows when the drought will end. There is a problem with the 500-hectare permit for mulga fodder. Say someone has a 60,000- to 90,000-hectare property and it is all on one title, what they get is one permit for 500 hectares. If the property is made up of three titles they then get three permits. If it is a large property on one title they will be feeding stock in different paddocks depending on the mulga and the waters, so they really need more than one permit to realistically feed their stock.

Around Charleville there are a number of properties that are one title. This is because of the south-west strategy back in the 1990s when there was a property build-up scheme to amalgamate titles. That is why we have a lot of properties with one title. These people are disadvantaged by Labor's vegetation management laws because of the one fodder permit per title situation.

Labor's laws removed the self-assessable code for thinning, and that thinning code worked very well with the fodder-harvesting code. Labor's laws expanded the power of entry to allow authorised officers to enter a place to monitor compliance for clearing of vegetation. The Palaszczuk Labor government created a situation where landholders have fewer rights than suspected criminals.

The policy objective of the bill is to amend the Vegetation Management Act 1999 to create an obligation on the chief executive to issue an information notice when an application for clearing is assessed under section 22A of the act and has been rejected, therefore creating a mechanism for an internal review.