




Speech By  
**Christopher Whiting**

**MEMBER FOR BANCROFT**

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Record of Proceedings, 14 May 2019

**NATURAL RESOURCES AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr WHITING** (Bancroft—ALP) (12.35 pm): I rise to speak in favour of the Natural Resources and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. Contrary to what we have heard, this is a great example of legislation that is open and accountable. This bill does a lot of good work in clarifying and simplifying provisions and creating new ones to keep these important acts updated. As we have heard, this bill will amend many acts—30, in fact. It is interesting that the government is being criticised for that. Acts need to be updated so that people in businesses are not burdened with outdated and unnecessary regulations and laws. It is not government overreach, it is timely and appropriate action. It is being effective. I believe we have given this bill appropriate scrutiny. I will discuss just a few parts of this bill. My colleagues the members for Ipswich West and Mount Ommaney will focus on other aspects.

Addressing the issue of CleanCo, I feel strongly about the creation of CleanCo. It is one of the most important developments that we have seen in the renewable energy sector. The renewable energy sector in Queensland is booming. This economic sector went from nothing under the previous LNP to today being an integral part of Queensland's regional economy. The federal government is not doing any leading in relation to energy policy. That has been highlighted in the federal election campaign. In Queensland it is the business sector that is leading the way on energy policy. Businesses all over Queensland are investing in renewable energy plans.

In the past two years 18 large-scale renewable energy projects have commenced operations in Queensland, bringing more than 1,700 megawatts into the grid. There are another 14 large-scale projects worth around \$2.8 billion that are currently under construction in regional Queensland. Our state is leading the push in the renewable energy sector. We have adopted a 50 per cent target by 2030. We also have the Powering Queensland Plan, a \$2 billion integrated energy plan for our state. As part of that plan we have set a target of one million rooftop solar panels, or 3,000 megawatts of solar photovoltaics, in Queensland by 2020. We are more than halfway there.

We know that rooftop solar power is now the biggest generator in this state. But we are missing an obvious component in the renewable energy sector: state owned low or no emissions power generation assets. We know the advantages of having state owned power generation assets. We can take action to keep energy prices low. We can only do that if we own those entities. It is because we own our current power generation assets in Queensland that power prices have continued to remain stable or fall for four consecutive quarters.

There has been a 1.3 per cent decrease for residents in regional Queensland and we are now delivering two annual rebates of \$50 for each customer. It is clear that we need strong state owned assets guided by strong directives. These parts of this bill really help that.

We are amending the RTI Act to designate CleanCo as a state electricity entity, which means that CleanCo will be subject to government direction. The entitlements of employees transferring from other organisations will be protected. I ask the LNP: how could you oppose or question employees retaining their entitlements? It is a fundamental part of what we need to do.

The bill will amend the Land Act 1994 to allow departmental officers to traverse land where necessary. If something is happening on unallocated state land such as illegal waste dumping or people illegally taking soil or sand, officers need to take enforcement action. Some unallocated state land can only be accessed by sea or air, or by going through other lots. In the committee hearings we asked how many lots of land this would involve. We heard that throughout the state there are 54 lots of unallocated state land with problematic access. The LNP has a problem with this clause because of 54 out of 17,000 lots of unallocated state land across Queensland. We learnt that in most cases there is no problem with traversing that land and people cooperate with the officers, although occasionally consent has not been given. Through the hearings we learned that Queensland officers will always try to get consent. Under the bill, they will give advance notice before traversing the land and there will be a make-good arrangement if anything happens.

In the hearings it was raised—and we have heard a bit about this today—that some landholders fear that the provision will allow the Queensland Herbarium to come onto their land and identify threatened species. That is a completely invalid fear. In the hearings I asked AgForce to identify any instance of something similar happening, but they could not give one example. No-one could specify how this could be a bio-security risk. No-one could give us an example of that happening.

I say to members in the House that we have delivered a fair and balanced vegetation management regime. It is a long-term and stable regime that has been around since the last century. To say that one amendment to the Land Act is designed to be a part of the vegetation management system or is designed to diminish property rights is simply fallacious. It is completely wrong.

I touch on the improved dispute resolution procedures. This is a large problem that we are resolving today and I am quite proud of this. Currently there are 24,000 subleases of state land in Queensland, that is, land that is leased from the organisation or person that leases the land from the state. If a sublessee has a problem with the head lease, they have to take it to the Land Court. That is their only option. Currently, there is no dispute resolution procedure. We are providing another avenue for people to resolve their problems, which is through mediation that can be nonbinding or there can be binding commercial arbitration. The Law Society has agreed to be the prescribed dispute resolution entity for this.

This amendment may seem minor but I ask members to consider this: at Tangalooma, \$1 million homes are built on subleases. There has been an intense dispute between the home owners and the head lease owner over the annual fees charged by the head lease owner for the likes of roads, electricity and waste disposal. One home owner is on the record as saying that he has an annual fee of \$41,000 for his sublease. To fight that he would have to go to court. There must be a better way to resolve such issues besides launching court action. Creating a mediation service for those 24,000 sublease holders—people and organisations—is the right and just thing to do.

I finish by touching on the issue of foreign ownership of land. The bill proposes to omit the need for us to prepare an annual report on foreign owned land and table it in parliament. It is unnecessary to do that because the Commonwealth government now publishes an annual report on foreign ownership. We still have the information. The Registrar of Titles will continue to collect foreign ownership data. Any member of the public can pay a fee and search that register and, as we heard, the minister still has the ability to produce a report if the need arises.

I have some unease about the LNP's decision to oppose this clause. I finish on this point: in a time of heightened political tension, it is always easy for the unscrupulous or politically lazy to whip up fears of foreign ownership. In this case I am referring to people outside of this House. The political outriders we see at this time are the least likely to have read the reports that we have produced over the years. They would rather spend millions of dollars in the media on fearmongering than spend a smaller amount to research and analyse the data that we have already collected. I do not fear foreign ownership and incursions in this country. I do fear the division and hatred about so-called foreigners that is whipped up by political opportunists at this time, merely to get political or financial advantage. I believe that is the truer threat to our country. I commend this bill to the House.