




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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**VEGETATION MANAGEMENT (CLEARING FOR RELEVANT PURPOSES)
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (6.28 pm): I am grateful to make a contribution to this bill, a bill that has been put forward only because Labor's vegetation management laws are bad legislation. Labor's laws are proving damaging to Queensland's primary producers and to the towns of rural and regional Queensland. These cynical, unscientific laws are damaging the interests of Queenslanders and the management of Queensland's agriculture and ecosystems.

Good environmental legislation at its heart is about stewardship. Countries around the world who are the most successful at environmental protection recognise that land ownership confers stewardship. You cannot separate the two. This nexus is at the centre of every successful environmental initiative. When you attack the ownership, you lose the stewardship. As I brace for the jeers from the government benches, let me say again that environmental stewardship is in the DNA of Queensland's farmers and graziers. They are the ones who live the environmental values that Labor pretends to espouse.

Labor, on the other hand, shows little understanding of Queensland's landscapes and seems to care even less about learning. If they did, then their disgraceful vegetation management policies might—just ever so slightly—connect with reality. They might recognise there are 13 different and distinct ecosystems in Queensland that require different management if they are to thrive. What is best practice for one ecosystem might be irrelevant or not very good for another. Evidence based policy would look nothing like Labor's approach. Their approach is rigid where it where it needs to be responsive; slow and bureaucratic where it needs to be agile and timely.

A perfect example of that is Tom Marland from Gin Gin. After nearly 12 months he was still waiting for hazard reduction permits when fire jumped a road and devoured his grazing lease. There is no point in the permit now, but guess what? The permit had been approved but not processed. As I said, it is rigid, slow and bureaucratic when it needs to take into account the reality on the ground and respond in a quick and timely way.

Because we understand this, when in government the LNP reduced the burden of red tape on Queensland landholders. We consulted widely and put in place a commonsense vegetation management framework. When Labor tried to overturn these laws with a brutal and clumsy approach—including a reverse onus of proof that denied farmers the presumption of innocence—the LNP led the fight that saw those laws thrown out. While examining Labor's recent Human Rights Bill it occurred to me that in drafting the bill Labor simply demonstrated that they knew their 2016 vegetation management bill trashed the human rights of a whole class of Queenslanders. They knew it and were happy to do it for votes in the West End of Brisbane.

When that evil bill was defeated in the chamber I knew that Labor would have another crack. For them it is all about consolidating their power. They actively demonise our farmers and graziers not because they think they are bad; they do not think about farmers and graziers because they could not care less about them. They are a convenient pantomime villain to show off Labor's green credentials to

the city elites. Labor's vegetation management laws attacked landholders' property rights by locking up almost half a million hectares of agricultural land with no compensation. At the same time, Labor shifts the cost of environmental stewardship onto those same landholders because Labor knows their deep love for the land and cynically exploits it. They know that those same farmers and graziers will work until they drop battling the erosion of our fragile soils and taking control of native plants, animals and feral pests and the infestation of our landscapes by exotic weeds.

Let me quote Dr Bill Burrows. Before his retirement Dr Burrows held the position of Senior Principal Scientist (Woodland Management) at the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. He spent over 40 years researching Queensland's vegetation scientifically. As he told a federal inquiry into the topic—

... research has shown that a practical approach to restructuring our grazed woodlands, based on detailed field trials, can lead to a tree-grass balance and structure that will deliver on both production and conservation objectives. The fact that agenda driven politicians, green bureaucrats and conservation zealots completely ignore such studies is telling. Their actions suggest that they—

Dr LYNHAM: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order on relevance.

Mr MILLAR: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Pugh): I have not ruled on the minister's point of order so you cannot have a point of order before I have made a ruling. The minister has raised relevance. I have been listening. I would ask the member to stick to the long title of the bill.

Mr MILLAR: Dr Burrows continued—

Their actions suggest they have no real understanding or interest in the continued well-being and livelihood of rural landholders in the grazed woodlands.

He is right. He also demonstrates scientifically the problem of regrowth and woodland thickening without active management. This can create real erosion problems, because without grass to hold it in place heavy rainfall will wash away topsoil. Grass is like glue for the soil; it holds the soil in place. Being around agriculture all my life, I have seen that firsthand. It plays an absolutely critical role in making sure we do not see erosion. The last thing that farmers and graziers want to see is soil erosion. When they cannot manage their properties and clear woody vegetation to allow the grass to come up to protect the soil, they see erosion. When the soil erodes it creates major problems for our production cycles. The trees choke out the grass but their deeper root systems let soils wash away. Farmers actively manage their land to prevent this from happening. Sadly, Labor is happy to paint farmers as environmental vandals, but it is their own unscientific laws that are setting up disaster.

There is barely an aspect where their approach is not deficient. The bill before the House seeks to address one aspect: accountability and transparency on the part of the government and the administrators making the decisions. Labor's vegetation management regime does not require the chief executive to give an applicant any explanation when rejecting an application based on section 22A. This is unacceptable. It is not a fair process and it is not a process that allows landholders to understand the legislation and learn how to work within it. They pay their \$3,500 application fee and are told no and to go away with no explanation.

This set-up also creates unnecessary administrative risks. It is likely to damage the reputation of the vegetation officers because they will be seen as arbitrary and even vindictive. Those officers are part of our local rural communities and live in our rural towns. They play sport, go to the RSL and are friends with these people—and they continue to be friends—but they are put in a position that stretches that friendship. We need to make sure that those officers—and obviously the graziers and farmers—work together and are not combative. The legislation that Labor put in has made it combative and unjust for farmers and graziers. That is something that we, as Queensland legislators, must not facilitate or endorse. That is why this bill is important.

It will compel the chief executive to issue an information notice where the application has been rejected based on section 22A. In doing so, it creates a rare opportunity for the scrutiny of those decisions. Not only will landholders better understand the requirements of the legislation but departmental officers can use the opportunity of the internal review to ensure their decisions are correct. Local government is, of course, a key landholder in regional Queensland, and the LGAQ supports this amendment because of the greater transparency it will create for local governments across Queensland when they make decisions on behalf of ratepayers.

Mr Bennett: The state has got to do more.

Mr MILLAR: But we need the state to do more, and I take that interjection from the member for Burnett. We have to make sure that we get this right. When Labor introduced the current vegetation management regime last year we saw a sham consultation process that completely ignored farmers

and landholders. We saw our parliamentary committee process mocked. Not a single recommendation of the committee was accepted. I went to those meetings, along with many of the members of this side of the House, and saw how landholders, farmers and graziers were ignored.

I always like to quote this statistic because Labor always talks about clearing football fields. The amount of vegetation cleared in Queensland is 0.23 per cent. If you want to include regrowth and land clearing in urban areas I think it comes to about 0.45 per cent. It is time for the Labor Party to stop demonising farmers and let them get on with the job of creating opportunities—

(Time expired)