Speech By

Patrick Weir

MEMBER FOR CONDAMINE

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VEGETATION MANAGEMENT (CLEARING FOR RELEVANT PURPOSES) AMENDMENT BILL

Mr WEIR (Condamine—LNP) (5.59 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the private member's bill, the Vegetation Management (Clearing for Relevant Purposes) Amendment Bill 2018. The bill was introduced into the House by the member for Traeger, Mr Robbie Katter, on 21 March 2018. The bill was referred to the State Development, Natural Resources and Agricultural Industry Development Committee, of which I am a member, for consideration. The bill moved by the member for Traeger is in response to the draconian vegetation management legislation that was passed in this House on 1 May 2018, despite the opposition highlighting the many failings of that particular legislation. This bill attempts to address one of those injustices.

The explanatory notes state that the objectives of the bill are to amend the act to create an obligation on the chief executive to issue an information notice where an application for clearing as assessed under section 22A of the act has been rejected. The explanatory notes go on to state that under the current legislative framework 'there is no right of appeal or review for a person who has made an application under section 22A of the act where that application has been rejected'. That should be a basic right.

The department stated that landowners do have options to appeal through the Planning and Environment Court or QCAT, but of course that is at great expense to the individual landowner. Creating an obligation for the chief executive to issue an information notice where an application has been rejected on the basis of section 22A would create a mechanism for an external review. The department stated—

If the Bill is passed, DNRME would update this form to include requests for internal review of decisions under s22A and update its existing internal procedures to include these reviews.

However, the department also stated that the amendment had the potential to affect resourcing implications if the bill is passed. The department stated—

The resourcing impacts on DNRME would include both resourcing of the internal review; resourcing for the department to provide evidence at QCAT hearings; and additional costs through its responsibility for providing appropriate funding to QCAT under a Memorandum of Understanding.

In itself, this should be no justification for opposing the bill. As I said before, this should be a basic right. The LGAQ stated—

The Bill … creates an obligation on the chief executive to issue an information notice where an application for clearing, as assessed under section 22A of the Act, has been rejected. The Inclusion of this clause provides greater accountability and transparency around decisionmaking for landholders and councils. The LGAQ therefore supports *Vegetation Management (Clearing for Relevant Purposes) Amendment Bill 2018.*

AgForce also supports the bill, stating—

The fact that applicants have had to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars through the courts to force the Queensland Government to administer legislation and regulations in a fair and equitable manner has adversely affected rights and is certainly not consistent with the principles of natural justice.

The report makes two recommendations, the first of which states that the committee recommends that the Vegetation Management (Clearing for Relevant Purposes) Amendment Bill 2018 not be passed. That recommendation is certainly not supported by this side of the House. As stated before, a right of appeal should be a basic right.

I note that the member for Hill has foreshadowed that the member for Traeger will move some amendments to the bill relating to mulga. As the committee did its investigation of the original vegetation management bill earlier this year, we found that that was a particularly contentious issue. I particularly remember going to Charleville, where the largest protest at any of the hearings was held. We went to a town hall that was jam-packed. People were concerned about their ability to harvest mulga. I remember one man who was very passionate about the issue, Scott Sargood. Scott Sargood had an enormous wealth of knowledge around mulga and mulga harvesting. He had big billboards outside of Charleville. Unfortunately, earlier this year Scott Sargood was killed in a gyrocopter accident. I take this opportunity to extend my sympathies to his family on their tragic loss. His death is a loss not only for the Sargood family; it is a loss for the west and a loss for the mulga lands.

We are going through one of the worst droughts on record. The price of stockfeed has gone through the roof, whether it be grain, fodder or cottonseed. This drought is different to most, because it has affected the whole eastern seaboard. Hay has been coming from as far away as Western Australia. The drought is increasing its hold. No cotton has been planted on the Downs, which will affect accessing cottonseed as we go forward. Any grain crops were in the south, but most of those have failed and been chopped for silage. There is precious little fodder available and the expense of keeping stock alive is enormous.

However, in western Queensland they have fodder. It is called mulga and it is available now. This is an opportunity for people to reduce their fodder bill by allowing them to access a product that is already there, readily available. In this extreme drought, if we cannot grant that access there is something seriously wrong with our thought processes. It should be a no-brainer. Members on this side of the House strongly support that. We encourage members from the other side of the House to show some compassion for our western producers and allow them to access mulga to keep their stock alive.