




Speech By  
**James Lister**

**MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS**

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**LAND AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (4.33 pm): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for covering my shift in the chair so I that I could speak; I appreciate it. I would like to make a short contribution, on behalf of the members of Southern Downs, to the Land and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. The aspect which is of most interest to me and I think to many in my electorate who depend on the cattle industry, which is a lot, is stock routes.

I begin by congratulating the minister for his very thoughtful remarks during his second reading speech about stock routes and the long paddock. I thought that demonstrated a really good understanding of the things that my electors would hope a government would understand when it is administering legislation such as this. It is not a has-been; it is not some kind of hangover from a bygone era in the way that we might think. I know that the drover has to a large extent been replaced by the cattle truck but, as we have heard a number of speakers on this side of the House say, stock routes are a vital fallback for industry. We have just suffered a very significant drought. In my electorate of Southern Downs, many—

**Mr Boothman:** It was crippling.

**Mr LISTER:** I take that interjection from my honourable friend the member for Theodore. It was crippling. One of the things that impacts communities long after droughts is if the owners of stock have had to sell down to pay for their feed until they basically have nothing left. If that results in them selling their breeders just before a drought ends, that is a significant economic blow, not only to individual producers and their families but also to the communities in which they live. From a mental health perspective and from an economic perspective, its effect flows onto the main street of the towns. I see my honourable friend the member for Theodore sitting next to me. He is an avocado farmer. Do you have avocado routes? They are below the ground I suppose, are they?

**Mr Boothman:** Avocados are the nectar of the gods.

**Mr LISTER:** I take that interjection. I am glad this issue has received some attention. One of the important aspects of this bill, from my perspective, is the benefit that local governments will receive from new fee retention arrangements.

I have the Goondiwindi Regional Council, parts of the Toowoomba Regional Council and the Southern Downs Regional Council in my electorate of Southern Downs. For smaller councils particularly it is a significant, onerous burden for them to maintain stock routes and to administer them for those producers who need to move cattle. I note that clause 67 will enable cost recovery by local governments by allowing local governments to keep all revenue received from application fees, permit fees, water facility agreements and fines for reinvestment in the stock route network. I think that is a good thing.

To give an indication of the kinds of commitments that local governments face with stock routes, it is not just a long paddock of grass; there is infrastructure involved. There is fencing. There are water points and associated water infrastructure for the cattle. There is also weed and pest management, which ostensibly the local government authority is responsible for. In addition to this cost, local

governments are up for the cost of assessing permits and working out what the pasture is like, what the carrying capacity will be, how far the cattle are likely to move in a day and when it will be free for the next lot. It is not just for movement but also for emergency agistment for producers of cattle who have lost their pasture: it has all gone, they have spent anything they can on providing feed for their cattle. As a last resort, I saw many cases in the Southern Downs where primary producers were taking their stock onto these stock routes to graze the grass that had not been touched.

It is important that we understand that the water infrastructure on the stock routes, particularly things like the old-fashioned windmill pumping water from the ground into a tank or into a trough, is not just useful for those who are on the stock route—it is not just ‘Clancy of the Overflow’ who benefits from those; local rural fire brigades in times of severe drought, like we have faced in Southern Downs, have been able to use that infrastructure to fill their trucks. Farmers have been able to obtain stock and domestic quantities of water from those water points, which have proven to be reliable over the course of time.

It is with pleasure that I see that this is a part of the bill. I know that local governments will correctly say that the funds that are likely to flow, the spoils to them, from this act will probably still not provide them with full compensation for the cost of administering the program, providing permits and assessments and so forth, but it will be an improvement and that is certainly something worth voting for.

One of the things that did provoke my ire—a number of speakers on my side of the House have mentioned it—is clause 94 and the alterations to vegetation management which are included in this omnibus bill. Obviously when there is a single change—it is something which occupies the political divide in this state—over something like vegetation management, it is unfortunate that it ends up in an omnibus bill such as this where it might not get the scrutiny it ought to.

I want to reflect on what my honourable friend the member for Gregory said. He made a very good point about what effectively sovereign risk is in that businesses that are relying on PMAVs and relying on lawful plans for how to use the vegetation on their properties for their business cases use those business cases to obtain finance. It would be like my honourable friend here saying that he was going to plant a whole lot of extra avocado trees only to find out that the legislation had changed unbeknown to him and the bank and he could no longer plant them. This is the kind of thing that we are talking about.

Vegetation management is a very sore point for many of my constituents who feel that there is not enough flexibility or understanding of the exact application of their properties and how they are managed, and they believe that they have been denied full use of their property in circumstances which do not necessarily provide a counterbalancing benefit to the environment. That is unfortunate, but I heard the shadow minister, the member for Condamine, speak with great gusto about that particular point, so it did not escape our attention. Maybe there was the hope that we would not notice, but we noticed.

There is one last issue that I want to point out, and that is the question of informing the public of changes and gazettal and so forth. It is a reality that many of our communities in the bush are losing local papers. My electorate of Southern Downs has been very lucky and has retained a number of papers after the departure of the News Corp ones to a digital-only format, so we still have the *Allora Advertiser*, *Stanthorpe Today*, *Warwick Today*, *Granite Belt Informer* and a number of different publications, plus the *Goondiwindi Argus*. The unfortunate thing, not by design but by oversight, is that some of these small papers are not approached by governments to advertise information, so when there are matters which have to be gazetted or proclaimed or promulgated in the community that revenue is very important to those newspapers that want to be the source of that news because they want to be that service to their readers.

I was speaking to the proprietress of the *Allora Advertiser* some time ago and she and her husband work very hard in that business but found out that during COVID for some of the period they were not offered advertising positions for important government announcements to do with COVID. That was unfortunate because not only did they miss that revenue and that opportunity to share in the benefits of government spending; it also meant that the actual purpose of informing the community about important government things was missed, at least for a time. I believe the government did respond when this was raised with it by the rural press association, but I caution the government to make sure that this is more than just a decision to embark on more modern mechanisms to promulgate decisions and changes and that every effort is made to retain advertising in the traditional newspapers, because in electorates like Southern Downs those small papers are the lifeblood of the community. They tell us about the funerals and the sports results, the sorts of things that a big paper that is online and run from Toowoomba or Brisbane will not tell us.

**Mr Boothman** interjected.

**Mr LISTER:** My son writes an article in the *Allora Advertiser* every week, so members can have a look at that.