

QUESTION ON NOTICE

No. 1045

asked on Thursday, 2 September 2004

MS MALE ASKED THE MINISTER FOR NATURAL RESOURCES AND MINES (MR ROBERTSON)—

QUESTION:

With reference to the Beattie Labor Government's 2004 election commitment to end broadscale land clearing by 2006—

What is the progress to date?

ANSWER:

The *Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2004* (the Act) underpins the framework of measures implemented to phase out broadscale clearing of remnant vegetation by 31 December 2006. The Act brings together and simplifies previously separate legislation for freehold and leasehold land.

A transitional clearing cap of 500,000 ha was placed on the allowable area of broadscale clearing for the period prior to 31 December 2006. The 500,000 ha was comprised of two areas: 300,000 ha approved for applications that were already underway as at 16 May 2003; and 200,000 ha for the area which was subject to the ballot process. No further approvals for broadscale clearing will be issued once the ballot applications have been finalised.

The ballot process involved applications being drawn randomly from a pool of applications received in each region. The applications will be assessed in the order in which they were drawn, for example, the first drawn application will be assessed first.

The ballot, overseen by the Queensland Audit Office, was successfully drawn on 17 September 2004. Applicants have been notified in writing of their place in the ballot. There were 860 applications considered in the ballot. Assessment of the applications against the relevant regional codes is now underway in order to provide as much time as possible for clearing to occur before 31 December 2006.

The new vegetation management framework provides for land managers to apply to clear for ongoing property management purposes outside of the ballot process. This will allow landholders to perform critical land management activities such as thinning and encroachment, weed control and maintenance of infrastructure. Ongoing applications can be lodged at any

time and these will form the bulk of assessments once the ballot process has been completed.

In addition to continuing to encourage farm scale vegetation planning, the State Government has also established a financial assistance package to support landholders adversely affected by the new laws.

The Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority is managing the \$130 million financial assistance scheme for farm businesses affected by new vegetation management legislation. Since 1 July 2004, landholders have been able to apply for assistance through this program. Assistance will be distributed through an application and assessment process for primary producers significantly impacted by the legislation to adjust their farm enterprise, or where properties become unviable, to exit from farming.

My Department has also established the Vegetation Incentives Program (VIP). An amount of \$12 million in total will be available to assist landholders in protecting valuable vegetation. Landholders will receive funding to undertake a range of on-ground works that they nominate for activities such as fencing, mapping, or removal of weeds. In return, landholders will be requested to enter into a management agreement and a covenant covering the area protected. The VIP is to be delivered by regional organisations. The tender for the delivery of the VIP in the Brigalow Belt South and New England Tablelands was won by Greening Australia. Eighteen landholders have been provided with expressions of interest as at 20 September 2004 through word of mouth and extensive promotional activities. Landholders will have until the end of November to indicate their interest in the program. Greening Australia will then work with those landholders to develop detailed bids. The tender for five of the other regions in the State will be advertised in the first week of October.

A further \$8 million is committed to assist landholders implement best management practices on their properties. The process for delivery of the funding is being developed closely with rural industry, in particular AgForce.

Overall, the implementation of the State Government's election commitment to end broadscale clearing is on schedule. It is the single most important resource management initiative ever undertaken by a State Government and will deliver lasting benefits for the entire nation by protecting biodiversity and reducing greenhouse emissions.