




Speech By
Patrick Weir

MEMBER FOR CONDAMINE

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**VEGETATION MANAGEMENT (REINSTATEMENT) AND OTHER LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr WEIR** (Condamine—LNP) (5.36 pm): I rise to make my contribution on the Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016. I will state at the beginning that I am strongly opposed to the amendments proposed in this bill. I have spent my life on the land, working to sustainably develop and manage a property that had been heavily timbered and originally unproductive. To witness firsthand the vast change once managed clearing had taken place, enabling the land to be highly productive whilst remaining sustainable, was remarkable. I think I have a much broader knowledge and understanding of the implications of this legislation than any who will speak to this bill from the government benches.

This legislation will place an immediate limit on the area of land that can be developed for not only high-value agricultural cropping and horticultural purposes but also any expansion of the grazing industry. The reasons given for this draconian legislation are ill-conceived, misguided, ideological and, most importantly, purely politically motivated. The proposed legislation will do more to destroy confidence in our regional communities than any other single piece of previous legislation that I can think of. It will not only destroy confidence; it will destroy development and ambition. For our future farmers to remain on the land and provide the food and fibre requirements for our increasing world population, they must have the ability to expand and develop new land. This bill completely removes that ability.

The bill needs to be seen for what it is—a deliberate attempt to secure Green preferences and save the seats of members such as the member for South Brisbane and the member for Mount Coot-tha. This was evidenced in the manner that the bill was rushed into the House after the increase in the Brisbane inner-city Green vote in the recent local government elections—where the Labor Party lost a ward to the Greens and were outpolled by the Greens in other wards. The Labor Party needed to address the bleeding of Green votes, so they went to their old favourites—tree clearing and farmer bashing. The haste at which the Labor Party introduced this bill into the House was amazing, not to mention the lack of scrutiny, in an attempt to pass this legislation as quickly as possible.

The bill was introduced into the parliament on 17 March 2016 with the committee to finalise the report by 15 April 2016. This was a period of only 19 working days which included Easter and the school holidays. The bill was intended to be rushed through parliament with as little scrutiny as possible. This was a totally unrealistic time frame for such an important piece of legislation concerning all of regional Queensland. The opposition moved an extension of the reporting date to 30 June 2016 which, after lengthy debate, was passed. The opposition were well aware of the need for scrutiny of this legislation due to the so-called consultation that took place during the formation of the bill.

The Minister for State Development and Minister for Natural Resources and Mines, Dr Anthony Lynham, who originally had responsibility for the bill, had stated on several occasions both in the House

and to the media that there would be extensive consultation for all stakeholders. This was to be achieved through a series of roundtable meetings. Whilst organisations such as AgForce, the Queensland Farmers' Federation and the resource sector were willing to attend these round tables and negotiate in good faith, the green lobby groups and activists undermined the process and refused to engage in any meaningful discussion. Due to the actions and extreme green views of green groups like the Wilderness Society, the process was unworkable. The extreme greens had succeeded in undermining the process and, as a result, passage of the bill was then transferred from Minister Lynham to Deputy Premier Jackie Trad. Minister Lynham had been sidelined and removed from carriage of his own bill because of the demands of the greens. With this change, all pretext of wider consultation went out the window and groups like the Wilderness Society got the result they were looking for.

The Deputy Premier had delivered the bill the greens were demanding; they are happy. As the committee found during the hearings and submissions, nobody else is—not AgForce, not QFF, the Queensland Resources Council, Cape York Land Council, the Property Council of Australia, Property Rights Australia, the Canegrowers or the Queensland Law Society—and the list goes on. Let me outline some of the reasons why these industry and agricultural groups are strongly opposed to the extreme measures contained in this bill.

There appears to be a view by those opposite and the green movement that farmers just go out and engage in widescale land clearing just for the sake of clearing. This shows a total lack of understanding and absolute ignorance about how expensive and time-consuming tree clearing is. Any land clearing undertaken by a landowner is only done after careful consideration and is targeted at the sustainability and increased productivity of that land. This is particularly so in areas that can be developed for high-value agricultural purposes, an option that is removed under this proposed bill. AgForce stated—

Queensland agriculture has the potential to grow from \$17 billion to \$30 billion over the next decade, delivering thousands of jobs and opportunities in our regions. To grow we need sensible—

and workable—

land management laws.

The proposed changes in this bill are anything but sensible or workable. Removing the ability to clear land for high-value agricultural purposes or irrigated high-value agricultural production will stifle rural community development, accelerate the urban drift of young rural people to the city and stagnate local job creation. The Cape York Land Council Aboriginal Corporation stated—

Aboriginal people on Cape York are the Queenslanders most in need to actually use their land for economic development so that they can break free of welfare dependence ...

How does this Palaszczuk government expect to develop the north? This bill will do exactly the opposite.

The proposed ban on clearing and managing regrowth under the changes to category C high-value regrowth will see a thickening of regrowth and a loss of ground cover, resulting in a decrease in grass production and difficulties with stock mustering. This will have a direct negative impact on property values with that loss being worn by the landholder.

Many submitters expressed concern over the inaccuracy of the vegetation mapping, which raises one of the most horrendous aspects of this bill: the reverse onus of proof and the mistake of fact defence. The Queensland Law Society was particularly scathing in their assessment of this aspect of the legislation. This will mean that any landholder under investigation for suspected breaches of the act will be deemed guilty until proven innocent. This is not the case if under investigation for murder, rape or any other criminal activity. The Queensland Law Society stated—

We regard this as a step backwards for justice in this state.

...

... administrative convenience ... does not justify erosion of the principle that a person is presumed innocent of an offence until they are proven guilty.

They added—

... there is no justifiable reason or proof provided to reverse the onus of proof ...

No matter how honourable members look at this legislation, it is a horrendous attack on the rights and profitability of our farming sector. No other sector of our community has had to endure an attack on their livelihood or basic legal rights such as the one the farming sector is facing right at this moment. No member of this parliament who votes to support this bill can ever say again that they support the agricultural sector or the rural communities that rely on the industry. I oppose this bill and encourage all members to vote this dictatorial legislation down.