



Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

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VEGETATION MANAGEMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (6.24 pm): I rise to address the Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018. As I have previously said in this place during the 55th Parliament, Queensland farmers take a responsible attitude and approach to vegetation management. In fact, farmers can always be trusted to be some of our best environmentalists, given the right assistance and appropriate incentives within a sustainable legislative framework. It can be said that the responsible care and due diligence with respect to the land of which farmers are custodians means it is in their interests to ensure the protection and long-term sustainability of such lands that they own and manage. Unfortunately, the Palaszczuk Labor government instead chooses to demonise our farmers and graziers to acquiesce to an extreme left-wing Greens agenda, and we have seen this time and time again under this socialist Palaszczuk Labor government.

The then Beattie Labor government's Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Management Act 2004 was a blatant anti-farming policy and served only to attack landholders' rights. The current legislation before us goes far beyond what even Beattie could have dreamed of and is one of the most anti-farmer, anti-agriculture and anti-rural documents ever presented to the Queensland parliament. The Labor Party does not care about our farmers and our graziers.

I have worked across Queensland in many rural communities, particularly in south-west Queensland. As a doctor and as a former president of the Rural Doctors Association of Queensland, I have had many patients who are rural landholders and farmers and I have seen their families as well. I saw them again outside today. The significant distress that this legislation is causing many of those people in their communities—mental health concerns—is unacceptable. To see those families today, to see those farmers and to have visited many communities in recent times and also in my previous role working in those rural communities, it is truly heartbreaking to hear their stories and the distress that they are feeling at this time.

It is for those reasons that the Liberal National Party opposition will not be supporting the passage of the bill before the House, as noted by the non-government members of the committee in their statement of reservation. The Palaszczuk Labor government has shown an extreme lack of any meaningful consultation with industry groups and the broader community on whom these laws will ultimately directly impact. Labor has failed to complete a cost analysis or undertake a regulatory impact statement on the economic and social impacts with respect to rural and regional Queensland.

High-value agriculture and irrigated high-value agriculture are already highly regulated areas of the current bill. The non-government members of the committee found the justification used for the removal of clearing for high-value agriculture and irrigated high-value agriculture from the act both ill informed and inconclusive. The inclusion of regrowth that has not been cleared for 15 years will secure over 862,506 hectares of land into the high-value regrowth classification, subsequently having a significant economic effect on regional and rural communities, which again seems to be of little consequence to this government.

The non-government members of the committee also highlighted: firstly, the exclusion of area management plans that provide an alternative approval system for vegetation clearing in particular regional ecosystems; secondly, the proposed accepted development vegetation clearing code—managing fodder harvesting for drought management as being unworkable, particularly with respect to the mulga lands; thirdly, the proposed accepted development clearing code for managing thickened vegetation being impractical and unworkable; fourthly, the expanded powers of entry that give the department powers that even the police do not have as being unfair; and, finally, the proven inaccuracy of the mapping. By the Statewide Landcover and Trees Study's own admission, there is no mapping of regrowth. This legislation has been introduced using SLATS data, which fails to be based upon science. To not base this legislation on science fails to tell the whole story around vegetation in Queensland.

The LNP argues that the following amendments should be made: firstly, regarding a deemed approval clause for clearing applications under the development application, if a decision for a vegetation-clearing application is not made within 20 business days, the application is taken to have been approved and the department will have only one extension opportunity of 10 business days; secondly, amend the definition of high-value regrowth vegetation from an area that has not been cleared—other than for relevant clearing activities—for at least 15 years to an area that has not been cleared for 29 years; and also install a development assessment process for vegetation management to support and maintain high-value agriculture and irrigated high-value agriculture.

Definitions for high-value agriculture and irrigated high-value agriculture can be modelled off the definitions in the current act for high-value agriculture and irrigated high-value agriculture clearing. Omitting the reference to clearing, for example, high-value agriculture is to establish, cultivate and harvest crops but not grazing activities or plantation forestry. Irrigated high-value agriculture is to establish, cultivate and harvest crops or pasture other than plantation forestry that will be supplied with water by artificial means.

At this point I would like to make particular mention of the lack of sufficient consultation with agricultural groups, Indigenous groups, individual local councils and the Local Government Association of Queensland. The Queensland Farmers' Federation and the LGAQ called for a regulatory impact statement process prior to approval of the bill to enable 'a comprehensive understanding of the environmental, social and economic impacts across all Queensland communities.' This was, however, denied by the government's own department.

AgForce opposes the removal of thinning self-assessable codes, the removal of area management plans and the changes to fodder harvesting self-assessable codes. The Queensland Farmers' Federation opposes the removal of IHVA clearing provisions and notes that only 5,608 hectares have been approved to be cleared since IHVA was brought in. To put that into context, as a percentage of the total land area used for agriculture that is 0.0039 of one per cent.

The Cape York Land Council Aboriginal Corporation and the Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation both said that the new unfair laws will perpetuate Aboriginal social and economic disadvantage across Cape York. The hidden impact of these laws means that Indigenous Queenslanders, particularly in the cape, will miss out on economic and employment opportunities. In essence, these laws are bad for Indigenous Queenslanders as it will deny yet another generation the right to develop and prosper from their lands. Mr Gerhardt Pearson from the Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation stated—

The first economic opportunity that hit the soil of Cape York was in 1873—145 years ago. For most of that time, our people, the Indigenous people of Cape York, did not participate. We were removed from our country. It has been only since 1992 that we have gained back land. There is a range of titles: Native title, pastoral leases, Aboriginal freehold, reserves, former reserves. We have only just started to sniff and enjoy the piece of dirt under our feet again in this short period and, essentially, this law takes that back off us.

I always hear Labor and the Greens talking about the importance of reconciliation, but when it comes to practical measures to achieve this outcome Labor and the Greens seem to fail time and time again.

In 2013, while in government, the LNP introduced sensible vegetation management laws and practices. Graziers and farmers were able to maintain fence lines and pull fodder to feed stock. With respect to vegetation management, Queensland's food production and supply and our state's agricultural exports will be affected by Labor's draconian proposals. Labor's proposed legislation will destroy jobs, destroy rural families and destroy our agricultural sector. Labor's laws will put the economic prosperity of Queensland at risk. As such, the myopic approach being taken by the Palaszczuk Labor government will have significant economic ramifications for many communities across Queensland. These changes will see rural and regional communities directly impacted by increased levels of stress, anxiety, depression, family dysfunction, social isolation, marriage breakdown and suicide. This follows years of insidious drought that has slowly drained farmers and communities of their livelihoods.

Recently as I travelled around Queensland in my shadow ministerial role I heard firsthand how these laws will adversely affect families and their communities. This treatment of our regional and rural communities by the Palaszczuk Labor government is plainly callous. I urge all members of this House to vote against Labor's proposed vegetation management legislation as well as the Palaszczuk Labor government's Marxist ideological and socialist political agenda. What is needed in Queensland is a government that can balance competing interests, a government that can drive and create economic prosperity, and a government that can create real jobs whilst delivering sustainable environmental protection. This is what the Liberal National Party will always be able to achieve when in government, unlike those members opposite. I do not support this bill, and in doing so I encourage all members to read the LNP's statement of reservation with respect to this legislation.