




Speech By  
**Jeff Seeney**

**MEMBER FOR CALLIDE**

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

 **Mr SEENEY** (Callide—LNP) (10.30 pm): Madam Deputy Speaker—

I rise to join in the debate on the Vegetation Management Bill, sick at heart and with a deeply felt anger ...

Those were the words that I said in this parliament on 10 December 1999: 17 years ago. Those words are every bit as relevant and as pertinent tonight as I rise to sum up the debate on behalf of the opposition in this parliament.

This is the 18th time in that 17 years that this issue has been debated in this parliament. There are 38 major amendments that have been included, according to the committee report, as well as myriad consequential and minor amendments since this legislation was first introduced into this parliament in 1999. There has to be a reason that deeply felt anger and that heartsickness that I express here tonight on behalf of my constituents and the people of regional Queensland has persisted down those 17 years.

The reason is obvious to anyone who has listened to the addresses that have been given by the people on this side of the House. The reason is obvious because this legislation was always unfair and unjust; it was always nonsensical and absurd; and it always produced outcomes on the ground that had nothing to do with the rhetoric of those who forced it through this parliament time after time. Back in 1999 in that speech I also said—

Today sees the culmination of a strategy that was designed to deliver an ideological goal to a noisy minority in return for—

Greens—

preference support in key urban seats.

It has not changed either. I also said—

Today sees the culmination of that strategy, which was dishonest at the start and is dishonest at the end. The strategy which has led to the introduction of this legislation has had dishonesty and deceit at its core. It has been driven by a dishonest and deceitful Minister who has grossly misused the resources of his office to divide Queenslanders and to set them against each other in the cynical pursuit of this nonsensical ideological agenda.

Those words from 1999 sum up the debate in this House in 2016 because nothing has changed. So many members on this side of the House have expressed the views of their constituents and have put forward the practical realities of the application of this legislation and the latest proposed changes over and over again. If anyone needs to understand the reason for the anger that has been expressed by the people on this side of the House, they need only listen to the responses from the other side of the House. They too have not changed in 17 years.

I want to pay tribute to some really great speeches on this side of the House, particularly from the member for Hinchinbrook and shadow minister. It was one of the great speeches I have heard in this parliament. There have been so many others: the member for Gympie; the member for Maroochydore who made a great speech about the impacts of this legislation on Indigenous communities; the member for Redlands who actually surprised me with the great speech that he made because he showed great insight into the issue; the member for Mansfield who brought a different perspective to indicate that this issue is not all about farmers but also about young homebuyers; and so many other members who represent regional seats—the member for Warrego, the member for Burdekin and the member for Whitsunday. A whole range of them expressed the anger and frustration of their constituents and tried to lay out the practical reality and the practical impacts that this legislation has on their constituents.

There is one particular sentence that I would recommend to the people of Queensland who are seeking to understand the rights and the wrongs of this debate, and that was something that the member for Hinchinbrook said in his address. He said that the 2014 SLATS report states clearly that woody vegetation covers about 51 per cent of Queensland and that the vegetation management activities reported in that year accounted for about 0.3 per cent of that woody vegetation in Queensland. That is not 0.3 per cent of the whole state, as the member for Hinchinbrook went on to say—because about half the state is covered by woody vegetation—but 0.3 per cent of that vegetation was affected in 2014-15, and yet on that basis member after member on that side of the House predicted all sorts of calamities for the people of Queensland, for the Great Barrier Reef, for the whole of mankind and for the globe. It was absolute absurdity from members such as the member for Murrumba, the member for Stretton and the minister himself. It was complete and utter garbage—

**Mr PEGG:** I rise to a point of order. The member for Callide accused me of speaking in this debate, which is misleading the House.

**Mr SEENEY:** I withdraw. The point is that all of those calamitous predictions are based on 0.3 per cent of Queensland's woody vegetation, yet just about every person who got up over there predicted the end of the Great Barrier Reef. Of that 0.3 per cent, only a percentage of that is actually in the eastern catchments. As was embarrassingly pointed out to the minister here one day, a fair percentage of the woody vegetation is actually in catchments that run the other way. Yet every member chose to invoke the emotiveness of a threat to the Great Barrier Reef to justify what is an ideologically driven agenda which has not been accepted by the people of Queensland who have been affected by it for the last 17 years and will not be accepted for the next 17 years.

Another issue that a lot of members over there used in their arguments, especially the minister, was an emotive portrayal of the SLATS data, which is the data that measures the thickening or the thinning of ground cover across Queensland. The figures were grossly misused, and the member for Hinchinbrook went into that in some detail. In summary, I would suggest the 0.3 per cent that has actually thinned is more than compensated for by the thickening in vegetation that is not measured by the SLATS process and there has been absolutely no mention—

**Mr Perrett** interjected.

**Mr SEENEY:** I take the interjection from the member for Gympie. Can I say that, in the 17 years that I have debated this issue, there has never been an acknowledgment from the government of what their own DPI scientists have told them for those 17 years: vegetation in Queensland is thickening. It has been thickening, and that constant thickening is a challenge for land managers.

Our government made three changes to the legislation, essentially. We made it possible for high-value agriculture to be developed—for agricultural operators to expand their operations in certain circumstances and for Indigenous communities to develop an economic base in the cape. We made it possible for landholders to control regrowth so that they would not be forced to reduce their economic activity because of that vegetation thickening. We also put in place a fair enforcement regime. Those are the three things this government now seeks to overturn—three things that any reasonable, sensible examination of this issue would lead a person to support: high-value agriculture, endangered regrowth and a fair enforcement regime. This bill seeks to reverse those changes that were positively welcomed by Queenslanders. This bill should be defeated.