

**HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**THURSDAY 18<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2015**

**NATIVE VEGETATION (ROAD VERGES) AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr PEDERICK ( Hammond ) ( 10:42 ):** I certainly support the Native Vegetation (Road Verges) Amendment Bill 2015. It is an excellent bill that has been introduced by the member for Morphett. This bill has been introduced to give management of overgrowth of roadside vegetation, and also works alongside the fact that many home owners and property owners do not do proper fire preparation on their properties. This puts more pressure on CFS firefighters when there is an alert, and people need to be aware that we need to have proper restrictions in place but also need proper legislative processes so that people will clear native vegetation on a road verge, especially for safety purposes, and to reduce the fuel load on the road verge. The definition in the bill states:

road verge means the area of land adjacent to a public road bounded by—

(a) the edge of the carriageway of the road; and

(b) —

(i) if the boundary of the property adjacent to the road is not more than 20 metres away from the carriageway of the road — that boundary; or

(ii) in any other case—a line running parallel to the edge of the carriageway of the road at a distance of 20 metres.

In the bill there are prescribed limits for the clearing of native vegetation. Any time we talk about native vegetation, whether in this place or out in the community, there are many and varied views. Some people would like to think we live in a pre-farming world and they want native vegetation to be everywhere. We do have a lot of national parks full of native vegetation and we have plenty of roadside mallee, not only in my electorate and into the electorates of MacKillop and Chaffey where I do a lot of my travelling but all throughout the state there is roadside bush and trees. There would be thousands and thousands of hectares of it, if it were put into a measure.

In recent years, we have seen much safety roadwork being done around the place where, perhaps instead of moving some vegetation, Armco barriers or wire rope cabling are put in place on roadside edges. I think it is time we became realistic and realise that perhaps, for safety reasons and fire control reasons, we do have to have some serious and sensible

management around native vegetation. I think this is an excellent move by the member for Morphett.

I want to make this point about fires. We had a fire about nine years ago in front of our property at Coomandook and it burnt through a heap of roadside vegetation because it actually burnt through parts of our property. The fire was lit by a lightning strike in scrub behind our property, then it crossed the road and the Melbourne-Adelaide rail line and came over the other side, so trees were burnt on either side of the road. It was a fairly wild thing to control, but we got there, thanks to the CFS and other volunteers.

**Dr McFetridge:** Hear, hear!

**Mr PEDERICK:** Absolutely. The smart thing in latter years, and even now, would have been to cut out those burnt sticks where the mallee was coming back—and a good fire makes mallee come back brilliantly—but you could imagine the howls of people coming down the road, especially if they saw a local MP with a chainsaw cutting down some of that wood. I am sure that is probably not politically correct.

Without naming anyone, a constituent of mine had a fire around the same time, and this was not on that major road. He got out there very quickly to rip down all the burnt sticks, and it looks absolutely beautiful where the mallee has been recharged by that fire going through. However, I guess it is all in the eye of the beholder and how you value that vegetation. It was interesting that I did see a bloke collecting firewood on the edge of the Mallee Highway the other day, but I do not want to get him into trouble.

**Dr McFetridge:** Doing a very good job cleaning it up.

**Mr PEDERICK:** Doing a very good job cleaning it up. We do need to have some sensibilities about native vegetation. Yes, it is a great thing to have. We have not been able to clear in South Australia since around the late seventies, and that is a fair point; it has been pulled up. In farming land, there was some overclearing on some sandhills but then, sadly, we have some very good country we have not been able to clear. However, that is the way it is and people accept that, and there are heavy penalties.

However, in relation to our roads and native vegetation on road verges, there are a range of safety issues, whether it be vision or the fact that people could run into this vegetation and get injured or, worse, killed. Also, in regard to firefighting, it creates that extra fire threat for people when the Country Fire Service and volunteers have to pull into gear and save lives and property.

I have talked before in this place about where I have seen overtaking lanes on the Dukes Highway put in the wrong place because they did not want to clear native vegetation along a straight, so they would put them

on corners, and that has caused many, many accidents. I know one south of Ki Ki, which I have talked about here before, where there would have been at least seven or eight deaths since that was put in. I know it has been there a while.

People just get confused. Not only are they involved in a three-lane highway for a while, but then it just comes to an end as you are coming around a corner. There could be some confusion with overseas drivers who are used to driving on the other side of the road or there could be fatigue, but I do believe it has contributed to road deaths and that is a very sad. I talk to my friends in the CFS who have witnessed these and they are traumatised by them, I must say.

I believe this is very sensible legislation from the member for Morphet. Sometimes you have to take on these tough environmental matters, and I am certainly taking on a couple at the moment. This is something we need to be have some sensibility about. I think the Native Vegetation Council many times gets a little bit excited and says, 'No, you can't do that,' but people need to be realistic: these are only roadside verges.

I know that, when councils go trimming roads and use a machine called the Hydro-Ax, they are very particular about where they go to cut out those roadsides, and they are very nervous about going too far because of the penalties. That is fair enough, but there needs to be some latitude. It does not just relate to whether it is a safety issue or whether it is a fire risk issue. There is also the simple fact that, for towing agricultural implements in this day and age, you need to have a decent, wide roadway.

I know what it is like when you have a wide line folded up behind your air seeder, you are going down a narrow road and you have collected a bit of eucalyptus by the time you have come to the end of it, but that is just the way it is. You have to transport your machines. If people do not take the right action and reduce the scrub affecting the road, that is just simply what happens.

We need to have more sensibility about this. We cannot just have this archaic idea that we are going to save every bit of mallee or every light tree along the edge of our highways and roads. We need to be realistic, we need to do it for the people of the CFS and other rescue agencies who have to deal with the trauma of road accidents, whether they be death or injury, and we have to do this for the families of people who have been killed or injured due to the way it has been in the past. It is sensible legislation. I commend it, and I hope it has speedy passage through this house.