

## Hansard

### Legislative Assembly Budget Estimates Committee B

2 June 2010

**Dr M.D. NAHAN:** On page 259 the last dot point refers to a rangelands reform program for the improved management of fire, feral animals and weeds. Could the minister describe what he has in mind there?

**Mr B.J. GRYLLS:** The Liberal–National government has been very determined to look at the pastoral industry, how pastoralists operate, how they raise capital and how they go about their business under some of the terms and conditions of the current act, which is quite restricting on what they can do. There have been some examples where pastoralists would like to diversify but have found the process is too difficult or the rules not flexible enough to enable them to do it.

I, as Minister for Lands, and Minister Redman as Minister for Agriculture and Food, are embarking on a major program to facilitate that diversification. We have done such things as writing to every pastoralist in the state and asking them to dare to dream about what they would like to do on their pastoral lease, so that we can get a bit of an idea, if there were no rules, of what they would like to do. As the agency we are looking to provide them with support to hopefully bring many of those projects to fruition. The money in the budget is essentially to put together a team to allow them to provide that level of one-on-one support to those businesses.

Obviously, the protection of the rangelands is absolutely vital. We need to make sure that the good environmental management of that continues. It is a key part of this. But in some instances pastoral leases required pastoralists to graze even though there might have been able to do better out of a tourism business. They were required to continue to graze because that is what the pastoral lease specified. We are just trying to look at all of that. We will be looking at amendments to the Lands Administration Act to allow for us to create more flexibility into the future.

There are some tenure questions around that. The bankability of a tenure is also important, as people try to borrow against leasehold tenure rather than freehold tenure, which is always more difficult, as the member would know. Off the back of the work that was done by the previous government we did a southern rangelands review, with Hon Wendy Duncan as the chair, which made some recommendation. In strong consultation with industry, hopefully we are bringing forward the innovations that are possible in pastoral leases.

We have a lot of interest in things like mining companies dewatering and moving to centre pivots for either fodder production or maybe a bit more intensive horticulture, which is exciting. Some of that requires special leases, which are pretty hard to navigate. So it is streamlining the process and so forth. Declan Morgan, who thought he was going to have to sit here all day without anything to do, is the boss of the lands agency in my department and I am sure can add some very insightful comments on that question.

**Mr Morgan:** The minister has given a pretty comprehensive answer to that question. We are pulling together a cabinet submission that outlines the details of the resourcing

requirements for that. There will be a significant legislative component that will result in the potential amendment of the Lands Administration Act, part 7, which relates to pastoral activities. There is the possibility of some new tenure types, and certainly the capacity to enable pastoralists to diversify their operations with significant more ease. There is a one-stop shop and a reduction of red tape around pastoral diversification largely.

**Dr M.D. NAHAN:** Is the minister considering perhaps in this process providing environmental stewardship grants to provide moneys to the pastoralists to protect, preserve and augment the environment of the pastoral leases?

**Mr B.J. GRYLLS:** It is a really interesting point. There has been some discussion about that. I think that the southern rangelands review pointed out that some of the pastoral activity in parts of the world is pretty marginal. What we do not really want as the government is for those pastoral leases to be abandoned, because then the management of wild animals and weeds and the general maintenance falls by the wayside.

We have seen in a newspaper story that the Department of Environment and Conservation cannot maintain some of the pastoral leases it has bought. The picture of goats wandering through that old homestead was pretty disappointing. No management is worse than a poor pastoral lease would be my argument. I put stewardship payments to the Pastoralists and Graziers Association. The PGA was not overly positive that it was a positive step forward. I am not sure whether it did not understand what was being suggested or it had a focus on somewhere else.

I do not think that stewardship payments are currently on the list, but I think the issue is worthy of further discussion and debate around the industry, because essentially, if the pastoralist does not manage the rangelands, somebody has to. What we always find in remote communities is that if that somebody has to be funded by government, it costs us about four times as much as it would to have pastoralists who could essentially stay on their pastoral property and reduce their stock to something that was more manageable and more financially stable for them rather than essentially risking everything year in and year out and pushing fragile ecosystems to the limit trying to make it work.

If we could almost give them a ranger's badge and ask them to undertake some work on behalf of the community in managing a pastoral lease and reporting on tests, weeds and other things, that to me would seem to be valuable. We are not there yet, but I appreciate the member raising that. It is something that we might look to in the future.