Mr KRAUSE (Beaudesert—LNP) (4.47 pm): I oppose this bill because it is fundamentally unfair: unfair to landholders, unfair to farmers and unfair to all people who live in areas where economic opportunity depends on the land. I table a petition from landholders in the Beaudesert electorate which would have been part of the petition of Mr Cripps except for a mishap with Australia Post along the way. Tabled paper: Nonconforming petition regarding the Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill [1321].

Imagine for a moment you are driving a car along a road; you see a speed limit sign with the number 100 on it so you drive at a speed of 100 kilometres per hour thinking, quite reasonably, that the speed limit on the road is 100 kilometres per hour. However, some way down the road, and without any notice of a change in the speed limit, you are then pulled over by a police officer and given a fine for driving over the speed limit even though you never went over 100 kilometres per hour. The police officer informs you that the speed limit is actually 80 kilometres per hour, that Main Roads had put up the wrong sign and that you were receiving a fine for speeding even though you never had any idea or any chance of having an idea that you were breaking the speed limit.

This example demonstrates why this bill is so unfair. There are dozens of stories about vegetation management maps produced by the department being simply incorrect and wrong. If a landholder obtains such a map, sees that part of his property can have vegetation management because it is free of restrictions on the map, but the department subsequently discovers that its maps were wrong and the vegetation management took place on the land in an area that was restricted by the new map put out by the department, the landholder is defenceless. Like the motorist in the example earlier who had no idea that the speed limit was 80 kilometres per hour because there were 100 kilometres per hour signs up on the road, it is unfair in the most basic sense for a landholder to be deprived of a defence for mistakes in departmental maps.

The legislation specifically removes this defence, which is available to everyone else charged with offences under Queensland laws, including members of criminal bikie gangs and other criminals. It is true to say that under this bill criminals have more rights in court than do our farmers. It is why the Queensland Law Society has objected to these laws which, in addition, are taking away the defence I spoke about earlier—that is, the mistake of fact defence. It also reverses the onus of proof. If the government thinks that landholders and farmers have broken the law, those landholders and farmers will need to prove their innocence; the government will not have to prove their guilt. This fundamental reversal of how our justice system works is targeted squarely at farmers and landholders, and it is impossible not to think that this is just a political get square aimed at farmers in rural and regional areas. The Deputy Premier compares this to the system for red light cameras and speed cameras. Let us be honest about this: the fines for running a red light or speeding are nothing compared to the fines and other consequences under the Vegetation Management Act. In fact, that comparison trotted out by the
Deputy Premier and her friends in the green movement is an insult to all our farmers and landholders across Queensland.

My electorate of Beaudesert has a very rich history of agriculture. We have been feeding the people of Queensland for over 100 years. This has been achieved through the clearing of land for farms. In fact, in Australia everywhere that produces food does so on land that has been cleared. This legislation reinstates heavy restrictions on the management of regrowth vegetation, meaning that when trees or saplings spring back up on land that was cleared generations ago, it is possible that that vegetation may not be removed in order to begin primary production again. That is an unfair element of the bill and an important issue for a couple of reasons.

Firstly, in some areas good productive land can fall into disuse for a long period, perhaps for economic reasons such as times being tough in the market or due to drought. Should that good land be locked up forever and not be used again? This is happening at a time when people in the cities of Australia are seeking more and more to buy food that is locally produced. They are seeking fresh, clean, Australian produce that you get from places such as my electorate—dairy and all types of food. We should not be putting in place a system that will lock up huge parcels of good agricultural land that has regrowth vegetation on it. That is unfair, but it is also simply bad policy.

The second reason why this is important and unfair is that it will impose huge costs on landholders who will have to keep their land cleared at all times to ensure that regrowth does not occur so that vegetation cannot be considered regrowth, meaning that the land would not be able to be used productively. We all know that the costs imposed on farmers such as water, electricity and other costs already make it difficult for many to make a living. Many simply will not be able to afford to undertake the constant management of land to keep it in production. That is unfair and it is also bad policy from a terrible government that has absolutely no idea how to support agriculture in Queensland.

Do members know what sector has been growing in recent times in Queensland, as many other sectors have gone backwards? Agriculture, especially agricultural exports. A lower dollar, combined with reasonable rainfalls and good markets in many crops have driven agriculture forward, especially in the export sector. However, this bill is a kick in the guts for agriculture and for those farmers who for generations have consistently underwritten the economic growth and future of our great state. It is time for Labor to stop kicking the farmers in the guts. It is time to stop the unfairness. It is time for this government to support fair laws for farmers, because with no farmers there is no food.

Earlier I mentioned the fact that vegetation maps are notoriously unreliable and wrong. They include references to types of vegetation that landholders and locals in particular areas know to be wrong. That notorious unreliability leads to great uncertainty about what activities people can and cannot carry out on their land. Uncertainty leads to a lack of confidence. I have seen the human side of that lack of confidence.

Shortly after this bill was introduced—shamefully brought before the parliament in the dead of night on a Thursday—reintroducing retrospective restrictions, combined with an attempt by the Deputy Premier to see this legislation rammed through parliament in less than a month, with precious little consultation, I was visited in my electorate office by a young woman from Beaudesert. She and her husband owned about 52 acres of land just south of Beaudesert. When I saw her, she was shattered. It was obvious that she had been very upset prior to attending my office and the reasons why became clear when she told me her story. She and her husband had purchased their block about three years ago. They knew that it had some remnant vegetation that they would not be able to remove. However, the vegetation map for their property—that is, prior to the implementation of this bill—showed that a good deal of their property was free of restrictions. The vegetation was regrowth because the land was previously farmed. It surrounded their house. However, now vegetation maps of restrictions cover their entire block. The young lady had big plans for her property. They wanted to improve the quality of vegetation on it and remove the dangerous trees. Now they can do nothing with it. They are absolutely gutted. Their dreams have been shattered.

Along with the dreams of that couple, the vegetation management bill before us today shatters the hopes for growth in agriculture in many parts of this state. In the south-east, the issue I see is primarily about regrowth restrictions. However, when we look to the north of the state, where economic development opportunities of the past have not been afforded to those communities, hopes and aspirations for economic growth are being shattered. The bill also adds uncertainty to all development. If people are uncertain, they just stop doing things, which is what the greens want. If an activity is regulated, for months or even years the government can tie people up in approving activities on their land, imposing compliance and regulatory costs on people who are required to procure expensive reports and to jump through the government’s regulatory hoops. It is as if the government does not trust farmers to look after their land. In fact, people will often simply throw their hands up in the air, despairing
at being put through the wringer again and again and again, and they will stop working their country. That is unfair and it is bad policy to impose such tight regulations that can absolutely deprive people of their livelihoods.

This bill is unfair and this bill is bad policy. It is bad policy because it will drive up the cost of housing for all Queenslanders. The Property Council has been quite vocal in opposing these laws. AgForce has been very vocal in opposing these laws. I commend them, especially President Grant Maudsley, whom I understand may be watching the debate from the gallery, for leading the campaign against these laws. The parliament should reject these laws. This bill is bad policy and, fundamentally, the bill is unfair for farmers, it is unfair for landholders and it is unfair for all Queenslanders. It should be rejected.