



Tree-clearing ban

Beattie imposes immediate moratorium



MR BEATTIE

From AAP's NIKKI TODD

BRISBANE: An immediate moratorium on all new land clearing applications was declared yesterday as the federal and Queensland governments moved closer to a compensation package for farmers.

Premier Mr Peter Beattie said the moratorium was effective "as of now" and followed a letter received from the Prime Minister indicating "significant progress" in the Federal Government's position regarding a compensation package for farmers.

Queensland, which has the highest land-clearing rates in the country, lags behind other states in addressing the issue following

an impasse with the Federal Government over who should fund compensation.

The full compensation package is believed to be in the region of \$100 million, but Mr Beattie refused to detail figures placed on the table.

He said the moratorium would prevent panic clearing of land by farmers while negotiations and consultations with all stakeholders continued — with an agreement expected as early as June.

The Toowoomba and Region Environment Council (TREC) immediately welcomed the Premier's announcement.

TREC co-ordinator Mr Bruce Boyes said 85% of Australia's tree clearing occurred in Queensland,

with much happening in areas west of Toowoomba.

"This clearing is having a devastating effect on biodiversity, with a host of species and ecosystems in the Toowoomba region now threatened with extinction," Mr Boyes said.

"The clearing freeze will take away the clearing pressure while the Queensland and Commonwealth governments negotiate a new land-clearing deal."

Mr Boyes said TREC representatives would be meeting with Member for Toowoomba North Mr Kerry Shine to discuss the tree-clearing controls. TREC would also be asking Mr Shine to ensure affected farmers got a fair financial package.

"We recognise landholders who are adversely affected by any new arrangements must be looked after. TREC is not anti-farmer. What we want to see is a viable and sustainable rural sector that is both prosperous and in harmony with the environment."

But Agforce president Mr Larry Acton said the measures could cost the State billions of dollars in compensation.

He said the moratorium on land clearing in the State would lock up large areas from future development if the temporary ban became permanent.

The future compensation bill could be enormous, Mr Acton said.

"If there is a total ban on tree clearing, it could be in the billions," Mr Acton said.

In Melbourne, Federal Environment Minister Dr David Kemp said land clearing was one of the most significant environmental issues facing Australia.

He said it impacted on biodiversity, the greenhouse effect, clean water and healthy land.

Dr Kemp said he would talk to stakeholders in Queensland about the moratorium next week.

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Next Saturday's Chronicle will carry an extensive questionnaire and we want you to have your say as we strive to deliver the reading experience and satisfaction you expect.

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Make sure you have your say on Saturday, May 24.

Triple treat



THREE TIMES OVER: Toowoomba grandmother Alice Finlay celebrated the arrival of three new grandchildren this week. Babies (from left) Zachary Dalkeith Ross, Zianna Athena Finlay and Daymon Riley Finlay were all born within five days. Full story, Page 2

Picture by BEV LACEY