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## **Retreat signalled on land clearing**

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A controversial plank of the -Palaszczuk government's proposed tree-clearing crackdown - the reversal of the onus of proof - is likely to be dumped.

The Australian can reveal that tomorrow a parliamentary committee will recommend scrapping that element, which has been panned by farmers, lawyers and key crossbencher and independent Speaker Peter Wellington.

Reversing the onus of proof means landholders -accused of unlawful tree-clearing must prove their innocence rather than the state having to prove their guilt.

In Queensland's hung parliament, the LNP opposition and the two Katter's Australian Party MPs are firmly against Labor's tightening of laws, so Labor needs the support of Mr Wellington and former Labor crossbenchers Billy Gordon and Rob Pyne for the legislation to pass.

Mr Wellington - who backed the Newman government's relaxation of vegetation management laws in 2013 - yesterday stopped short of saying he would support Labor's changes if the reverse onus was removed.

"I've tried to be consistent in my decisions in the parliament and unless someone presents me with a convincing case and overriding evidence as to why I should change my mind I will remain consistent," he told The Australian. He said he would make up his mind after he had read the committee's report and considered any possible amendments.

Mr Pyne is supportive of the government's legislation, which bans large-scale clearing of native vegetation for cropping and high-value agriculture.

The parliament's Agriculture and Environment Committee will report tomorrow on Labor's legislation, which will be put to a vote in -August at the earliest.

It is understood half the -committee - three LNP and KAP MPs - will recommend the laws be voted down while the three Labor MPs will suggest the -reforms be passed, but with amendments.

Mr Gordon yesterday said he was still undecided, but that the Palaszczuk government needed to do more to sell land-clearing changes in his far-north Queensland electorate of Cook.

Mr Gordon, who is being pressured by indigenous and agriculture groups to block the laws, said he would meet the KAP MPs this week to discuss the legislation. The MP, who represents the vast Cape York region, will also have talks with Mr Wellington.

"There is a real lack of popularity for the changes up here," Mr Gordon said. "I think the government still has a lot of heavy lifting that it needs to do. (Farm lobby) AgForce has done a great job in representing its industry and putting forward its argument. The problem in this whole debate is that there is no balance from -either side." Mr Gordon, who has attended stakeholder meetings with local councils, and indigenous, farming and green groups, said land clearing was a significant issue.

KAP MP Robbie Katter said his opposition to Labor's changes had not softened. "We're doing everything we can to tear this bill down, and we'll use every bit of influence to tear it down," he said. In a submission to the inquiry, the Queensland Law Society said the onus reversal "does not -accord with natural justice".