Greg Roberts

QUEENSLAND’S new Liberal National Party is set to ditch Labor’s ban on tree-clearing in a move that will anger moderate Liberals and complicate plans for the Rudd Government’s carbon trading scheme.

Plans to review the ban emerged as LNP leader Lawrence Springborg blamed Liberal infighting for a poll that showed the party had failed to win over voters in the two weeks since the state coalition partners merged.

LNP strategists said that with former Nationals having a two-to-one membership majority over former Liberals in the LNP, the ban on broad-scale tree-clearing would be eased.

The ban came into force in 2006 and is deeply unpopular with farmers.

LNP president Bruce McIver confirmed it would be reviewed. “This is one of those policies we will be working our way through,” he said.

Mr McIver would not be drawn on whether the ban would be scrapped. “We need to have those discussions.”

LNP Maranoa Federal Electorate Council chairman Lindsay Reardon said most former Nationals wanted restrictions on tree-clearing eased.

“They have affected the viability of rural industries everywhere,” Mr Reardon said.

“Plenty of people have been hurt by shutting the whole show down. We need a better balance and that’s why we want it looked at again.”

Mr Reardon dismissed estimates by experts that tree-clearing in Queensland had accounted for an estimated 10 per cent of Australia’s greenhouse gas emissions before the ban was imposed.

“Our policy on scrub being pulled is not going to have any effect on greenhouse gases,” he said.

Queensland Nationals senator Barnaby Joyce said the ban had unfairly penalised large numbers of farmers who were not compensated for losing their ability to expand production.

Former Queensland Liberal vice-president Graham Young said removing the ban would damage the LNP in southeast Queensland seats that it needed to win.

“They have to be careful they are not seen as a country party which is not interested in the concerns of non-rural voters,” Mr Young said.

Analysts have suggested that Premier Anna Bligh may go to the polls this year, but Ms Bligh said yesterday her Government would serve its full term, with an election likely late next year.

Climate Institute chief executive John Connor said that if the LNP won the election and removed the tree-clearing ban, the move would force the transport and energy sectors to shoulder a bigger burden of costs under the carbon trading scheme.

“The reduction in land-clearing has been the critical factor in allowing us to get close to the Kyoto target on emissions,” Mr Connor said.

“If that is reversed, it has the potential to blow apart our strategy to reduce emissions further.”

University of Queensland climate change expert Norman Duke said the resumption of broad-scale tree-clearing would “hugely” boost greenhouse emissions.

The Galaxy poll of 800 voters, conducted for Brisbane’s Sunday Mail newspaper, put support for the LNP at 40 per cent, down from 42 per cent in a June poll.

On a two-party-preferred basis, Labor on 53 per cent had a six-point lead.