



Speech by

PETER WELLINGTON

MEMBER FOR NICKLIN

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NATIVE TITLE (QUEENSLAND) STATE PROVISIONS AMENDMENT BILL (No. 2)

Mr WELLINGTON (Nicklin—IND) (11.40 a.m.): I have listened to hours of debate on the Native Title (Queensland) State Provisions Amendment Bill (No. 2) and I have come to the conclusion that, whilst everyone has an opinion, there is no way that we can resolve this matter without getting someone offside. There is no quick fix, no easy solution. In fact, you are damned if you do and damned if you do not.

The Government maintains that the legislation is fair and reasonable. The Opposition slams it as divisive. The Leader of the Opposition has foreshadowed that the coalition will move a series of amendments when the Bill reaches the Committee stage.

In a bid to understand the ramifications of this Bill and to assess its impact on the State and the major players, I had an informative meeting with a representative of the Queensland Mining Council. I admit that I do not share the Queensland Mining Council's doom and gloom predictions about the legislation.

I also met with members of the Queensland Indigenous Working Group and visited North Stradbroke Island at the invitation of the Quandamooka Land Council. A member of the Leader of the Opposition's staff briefed me on the Opposition's concerns regarding the Bill and flagged the Opposition's intention of moving a series of amendments.

After studying the Bill I am of the view at the moment that it is the best option to address the highly complex issues involved with native title. I believe it will keep the State moving by setting the ground rules within which the various parties must operate. I believe it will give the mining industry the certainty it needs to continue investing and exploring. It will allow farmers to plan for the future with confidence. It will give the indigenous people the comfort of knowing that they can protect their sacred sites.

I believe that a major benefit of this Bill is that it will save millions of dollars and thousands of hours that would otherwise have been spent fighting legal battles—yes, many millions of dollars of not only the mining industry's money but the money of the Queensland taxpayer. To my mind that is a huge saving. In fact, the only people who will lose considerably from this Bill will be the legal profession, which would have reaped a bonanza. Let us face it, the mining industry is naive if it thinks that the indigenous people will sit on their hands while their sacred sites are challenged. There is no doubt that without this legislation there would be ongoing court battles for decades.

I have looked at the Bill and, whilst it is not perfect, it covers most of the issues. Nothing is set in concrete. If there are problems they can be fixed. The legislation can be amended to suit whatever issue arises. What we should keep in mind is that every one of us—politicians, miners, farmers and Aborigines—wants to see what is best for Queensland. No-one, least of all me, wants to see the State going backwards. I believe that this Bill is a genuine and realistic attempt by the Government to resolve the conflicting interests over the issues of native title. I want what is fair and reasonable for all Queenslanders and I believe that this legislation is just that. Thank you for your patience.
