



Speech by

BILL FELDMAN

MEMBER FOR CABOOLTURE

Hansard 5 October 2000

NATURE CONSERVATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr FELDMAN (Caboolture—CCAQ) (11.39 p.m.): We all watched in amazement the feats of our Olympic athletes over the past fortnight or so. None was more aspiring to young horse riders of today—out there in their little pony clubs, out there learning to ride, out there learning what to do and trying to enjoy their sport—than the gold medal winning ride of Andrew Hoy on his horse, Darien Powers, and the other boys on their respective mounts in the three-day endurance event. These little clubs would be expecting a little bit of a windfall out of the Olympic Games over the coming months and years as their sport is highlighted and given the credence that it deserves. It teaches people to go out and enjoy their environment, enjoy riding horses and enjoy the responsibility that comes with the ownership of horses.

These little clubs would be expecting that windfall for their recreational sport out of the efforts of the horses and riders in the XXVII Olympiad. However, what do they have to look forward to from this Beattie Labor Government? They can look forward to reduced areas of forest in which to ride, perhaps even being locked totally out of areas of forest. That is some platform of support for this electorally sensitive Government. It appears that it is more interested in rorting the electoral system than helping those people whom it should be supporting in their sport.

On Tuesday morning, a desperate plea was made to this Parliament by over 5,150-odd recreational users of State forests for this thoughtless Minister for Environment to honour his commitment of no net loss of State forest to recreational users by way of petition. The petition was tabled in this place on Tuesday morning.

On Saturday I was out at O'Shea Road at a heritage trail at Wamuran and picked that up from the Environmental Access for Recreation Federation—Anne Barlow and Lou Wolf, to be exact. That petition is just a typical reflection of the anger that is out there in the community at the moment about the closing down of access to State forests for the pursuit of recreation. There was a rather large and very volatile group out there whom no doubt the Minister probably did not want to meet—the same as he did not want to meet the people at Brookfield. This group are striving for a better deal from this Government for horse riders, for four-wheel drive enthusiasts and for trail and mountain bike riders who form the association. Recreational users of the State forest are another group who are now seriously contemplating marching on Parliament, or riding on Parliament, to protest at the closing down of their State forests for recreational pursuits.

Everyone has the right to enjoy the pursuit of their recreational activity. With this Minister wanting to close down parts of the Brisbane Forest Park to recreational users, I ask him if he can identify some parts of that forest that are going to be left suitable for horse riders or other people to pursue their sport or recreation.

The Minister has refused to answer correspondence from this group requesting some advice, and he wonders why they are so upset. If the Minister is not careful, it may be a little bit more than milk that might be spilt on the steps of Parliament in the upcoming months. But then again, as one very upset rider said on Saturday, the smell of horse manure is times preferable to the stench of the policies of this corrupt Beattie Labor Government.

Mr Welford: Be charitable.

Mr FELDMAN: I have tried to be charitable to the Minister.

That brings me to a few sensitive little matters that I would like to mention. I have a letter from a Mr Mathers, which the Minister is probably aware of, that came to him via the Honourable Wendy Edmond. It states—

"My chosen sport is endurance riding, we ride distances of up to 160km in one day and some events much further over several days. I not only rely on the use of Brisbane Forest Park for my training but I rely on the access to state forests all over Queensland for my sport. The sport is not sponsored by big corporations but by individuals own efforts and clubs that hold events and use the forests.

Unlike the horseracing industry we don't have the funding and support that industry enjoys, however, Australia is recognised for endurance horses with buyers from all over the world and in particular the United Arab Emirates. The Australian Labor Party (Queensland) promotes a policy of jobs, many people rely on this sport for their income, whether they are farriers, vets or horse breeders. I consider the government knows very little about this industry and the effect changing of the tenure to 'conservation estate' will have on the industry.

The government keeps the forests accessible by maintaining tracks for access by fire trucks, our sport largely only requires access to these same tracks in order to ride horses. As you may be aware, The Gap Pony Club is holding a fun rally ride this weekend through Brisbane Forest Park, they expect 200+ riders to attend. This is their way of fund raising so their kids can continue horse riding as a sport and in safety (off the roads) and by keeping them busy and out of trouble. What would happen to The Gap Pony Club if for example their forest was closed up?"

We know what would happen. That little club and everyone in it would just perish, or the children would have to travel miles, putting their parents to more and more expense and probably driving the children out of their sport. The Minister would probably be responsible for robbing a future gold medal winning athlete of a place in history because of what he is doing with the State forest. This Minister is denying some child the right to grow up to enjoy the sport that they deserve to be able to enjoy.

The Minister thinks that this matter is a joke. The Minister thinks that a lot of things are jokes. He thought that the kangaroos out at Toorbul were a bit of a joke, too. However, the radio certainly showed that the Minister was wrong. I tell the Minister that some of those people wished that they had taken one of those buck roos and tossed it into his place, too.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Nelson-Carr): Order! Could the member please stick to the topic.

Mr FELDMAN: I am. The Minister is the topic. The letter goes on to state—

"The government has so far indicated that there would be no net loss of forest access to recreational users. What is to say the forest as we know it today is closed up, but to replace it the government provides us with one of five classified forests in north Queensland, obviously that scenario would be totally impractical but in line with what the government is offering. Further, the promise of a forest reserve with a five year sunset clause is guarantee of continued access.

I have one request of Mr Welford. Will you state in Parliament there will be an increase of public land available to active sport and recreational users throughout Queensland as a result of the South East Queensland Forest Agreement."

I think we will be waiting a long time before we get that response. I have another letter from that same writer. It states—

"I am in receipt of the response from Mr. Welford in relation to my letter sent to you on 14th August 2000 concerning the effect of the South East Queensland Forest Agreement on horse riding in the Brisbane Forest Park.

Let me say, I am extremely disappointed with his response.

In the first instance, Mr Welford requests I contact Mrs. Fiona Botham of Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service with any further concerns. The representations by the QPWS at the FRRG clearly indicate that there is a firm agenda set down by the government, clear in at least two respects. Firstly, the issue of the five year sunset clause on the Forest Reserve with little or no consideration as to the impact on equestrian activities. Ask the Minister about the background and why the State forests are being placed under the auspices of the Nature Conservation Act ... we should rely on negotiation given the Directions Report indicated a possible 50% access loss under Scenario F.

Secondly, the FRRG and the sub regional group consultations are really a facade. Ask the Minister to explain the objective process currently being used to negotiate access. We were led to believe that MUMPS (Multi Use Management Planning System) would be used to evaluate the protected areas. Can he describe the objective process being used and is he willing to be scrutinised to the government's commitment to 'high standards of accountability, consultation and ethics' (stated in its Seven Priorities document).

Therefore, I am responding directly to you.

Whilst Mr. Welford did not answer the specific question in my initial letter he has confirmed that Brisbane Forest Park will be affected by your government's proposed changes. He indicates 'it may be necessary to identify adjacent, less sensitive areas to provide recreational access for horse riders'."

He actually says—

"Please identify a recreational access area for horse riding adjacent to Brisbane Forest Park?"

Can the Minister identify that for the writer of this letter, Mr Mathers? He says—

"In the interests of other forest users, I will forward Mr Welford's response to 780 members of QERA, 2000+plus Queensland members of the Equestrian Federation of Australia, the 7659 members of the Pony Club Association of Queensland and the 850 Queensland members of the Australian Trail Horse Riders Association."

He goes on to say—

"I will ask them to pass on the information to the many veterinarians, farriers, horse breeders and stock feed merchants in their districts to ensure that the horse riding-owner community at large fully understands what this government is proposing, and how, through its lame approach to consultation through the QPWS, will ultimately affect their recreational right in their respective districts."

Mr Welford: Who wrote this?

Mr FELDMAN: Mr Mathers. I will table both letters and the Minister's response. He goes on to say—

"I understand a set of amendments will be tabled when this bill is tabled for debate in the next sitting of Parliament ..."

However, he did not realise that it would be brought on at 11 o'clock at night and that it would be railroaded through, just as most sensitive Bills get railroaded through this place. It would not surprise me if it is set to be gagged as well.

Mr Rowell interjected.

Mr Welford: Are you whingeing again?

Mr Rowell: No, I am just saying some facts to you, and they are not particularly good.

Mr FELDMAN: Government members do not like facts and truth in this place. The last paragraph states—

"I understand a set of amendments will be tabled when this bill is tabled for debate in the next sittings of Parliament on behalf of the recreational forest users throughout Queensland. I implore you to consider them on their merits and in the light of your own government's commitment to 'Valuing the Environment' "—

that will be the day—

"(and ensuring 'responsible and sustainable access to Queensland's natural resources', which we support and adhere to) and the recreational interest of the constituents in your district."

I will table those two letters and the Minister's response. I have seen first-hand exactly what the Minister's response to people who care for the environment is. I saw his response initially to the Bribie Island State School when it was being locked out—

Mr Welford: They were embarrassed by you.

Mr FELDMAN: They were not embarrassed. The Minister should look at the correspondence. It was the Minister they were hunting for. It was the Minister who made it almost untenable for them to look after the dunes at Second Lagoon on Bribie Island. They had been looking after those dunes for 15 years. For 15 years they had been doing something for the environment on Bribie Island, yet the Minister was going to lock them out. He was going to charge them \$3.50 and require portable toilets, making it very expensive for the families to try to do something that they had enjoyed for 15 years. The school had gone out of its way to acquire tents, boating equipment and everything else necessary to

go out to that place and camp there, yet the Minister was going to lock them out. The Minister was caught out badly. He was shamed. They are now going to be able to enjoy it for one further year. Why does he not make a commitment for another 10 years rather than just one more year? How about 20 years? Can they enjoy it for another 20 years?

Mr Welford: I'll tell you what, I'll give them another 10 years if you give an indemnity against the health of the kids who go in that polluted pond. There you go. I personally give you that. Get your act together. You're a disgrace.

Mr FELDMAN: What absolute rubbish this Minister talks. That spear bore was tested.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Caboolture! This is not relevant. I ask the member to stick to the point. I ask the Minister to refrain from interjecting.

Mr FELDMAN: Madam Deputy Speaker, I am sticking to the point. We are talking about the recreational use of a forest area that is now a national park on Bribie Island and I am talking about what this Minister has done to it. It is nice to see the Minister in the House. Happy hour has obviously finished.

The point is that the Minister was caught out and he was shamed into responding by allowing these children back into an area that they have enjoyed for the past 15 years. That spear bore was tested twice by the council and passed. They used the water from that spear bore only for showering. They learn canoeing on Second Lagoon. They have been doing that for over 16 years. They have been rejuvenating those dunes and putting back into that environment.

Mr Knuth interjected.

Mr FELDMAN: That is true. I thank the member for Burdekin. The Minister has made a joke out of what that community does with its own land, time and money. Were he not shamed into doing something, those children would not have enjoyed it this year as well.

All of the pony club members, four-wheel drivers, trail bike riders and mountain bike riders will get locked out of these forests through the inaction of this Minister and his department. The Minister has received a petition with 5,155-odd signatures on it. The signatories want to know exactly what he is going to do to assist them. If he does not do anything, that little petition will grow, as will the anger of these people and as will the heartache for the Minister's Government. All they want is to be able to enjoy the recreational activities that they have enjoyed for the past—

Mr Knuth interjected.

Mr FELDMAN: They have enjoyed horse riding ever since we have come to this country. That is how long they have been enjoying horse riding all around Australia and Queensland. They are now being denied the ability to ride over land they have ridden over all of their lives. It is a shame that this Bill is about locking people out of enjoying something that rightfully belongs to every Australian and every Queenslanders. But that seems to be the path of the Beattie Labor Government. It is locking people out of what they enjoy.

Mr Knuth: Stopping fun.

Mr FELDMAN: It is stopping fun. This Government will be renowned for stopping fun and for preventing people from enjoying their weekend activities. This is a Government that does not like other people having fun. This Government has fun at other people's expense.

It is about time the Government realised how many people it is affecting through the Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. It has provided a sunset clause of only five years. The people most affected—the recreational users—were not even invited to be a signatory to the South-East Queensland Regional Forest Agreement. Everybody else got a bit of a look in, but not recreational users—no way. They represent the largest proportion of all users, yet they were not included in that agreement. They were not even consulted by this department.

Mr Schwarten: You've only got one minute to go.

Mr FELDMAN: I have and I am going to use every second of it. The Minister has not and will not—

Mr Welford interjected.

Mr FELDMAN: It is a joke to the Minister, but it is not a joke to all of the people in those clubs.

Mr Welford: You're the joke.

Mr FELDMAN: The Minister is the joke. He will be the joke at the end of the day, because people will realise that he is having a joke at Queensland's expense. The people are watching the Minister. They know exactly what the Minister for the Environment is really like. He is locking them out and destroying their recreational activities. They know well and truly what the Minister is like.

Time expired.
