



Speech by

Dr DAVID WATSON

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

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NATURE CONSERVATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Dr WATSON (Moggill—LP) (Leader of the Liberal Party) (11.29 p.m.): I rise to speak on the Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, which aims to deny decent Queenslanders access to activities which should be encouraged, not discouraged. As we know, horse riding is not allowed in national parks in Queensland. The only exception is where the National Trail, which runs all the way from Cooktown in north Queensland to Healesville outside of Melbourne, passes through a national park.

Mr Hegarty: Has the Minister ridden that trail, I wonder?

Dr WATSON: The Minister could not ride a bike, let alone a horse.

What does this Bill have to do with horse riding in national parks? Everything, because clearly the long-term objective of the Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill is to turn more and more of Queensland into national parks.

I am not opposed to national parks. In fact, I am in favour of national parks. They are a magnificent resource and a wonderful way of protecting natural flora and fauna. They are also a way of preserving part of our State for the enjoyment of future generations, but putting 425,000 hectares of State forest and timber reserve land to protect the status is moving too fast too soon.

This Bill is very clear in some of its aims and very vague in others. It states quite clearly that within five years the area of land covered by the Bill will have to be rezoned or change tenure into one of five designations. Various parts of that 425,000 hectares will become either national park scientific, national park recovery, conservation park or resource reserve, but the ultimate destination of every last hectare of that land is national park.

Mr Welford: Not true.

Dr WATSON: We will get to that in a moment. As the Minister's second-reading speech says—

"A capacity is available to prevent the issue of any authority that could compromise its ultimate dedication as a national park."

That is the key part of the Minister's second-reading speech and that indicates precisely what the significant objective is.

In the not too distant future—in some cases as soon as five years—ordinary, decent Queenslanders are going to be locked out of places where they have traditionally been able to enjoy activities such as horse riding. I received a letter from the secretary of the Australian Trail Horse Riders Association of Queensland, Alison Arthur. The Minister has received some letters from a number of other people, some of which he has not replied to, but the important thing that Alison says in this letter to me is this—

"We do not welcome this Act, we are far from happy and extremely concerned that the Forest reserve has a sunset clause of 5 years and, within that time, it MUST be transferred to one of three National Parks, Conservation Park or if still under lease, Resource reserve.

We do not believe this is in the best interest of the majority of Recreational Users, nor the Forestry, as active recreation will be extremely restricted, consequently causing overuse of areas which will cause degradation."

The Minister, of course, did actually attend one rally that the recreation users had at Rocklea—

Mr Welford: Greatly loved.

Dr WATSON: No, actually he is not greatly loved. He failed to turn up to the first one, which was held at Brookfield, and he also failed to turn up to the one on 16 July at the Brookfield showgrounds. I would have welcomed the Minister—

Mr Welford: Did you go to that one?

Dr WATSON: You bet I did.

Mr Welford: It was about time you turned up to something.

Dr WATSON: I would have welcomed the Minister to my electorate. If he had come, he might have actually learnt something.

Mr Welford: Not from you I wouldn't.

Dr WATSON: What the Minister would have learnt is that there is a whole range of recreational users who understand that the Minister simply has not lived up to the promise he gave them at Rocklea. That point was made time and time again by representatives from every type of recreational user in Queensland.

Mr Welford: Your idea of recreation is real estate development. We know what you're up to.

Dr WATSON: The problem the Minister has is that he does not understand how the vast majority of people use national forests in Queensland for legitimate reasons such as horse riding or motorbike riding or whatever. The Minister was prepared to make a commitment at Rocklea, but he failed to deliver on that despite the number of discussions departmental officers had with the various groups, and then he did not have enough guts to turn up at Brookfield on 16 July and face up to the fact that he was hoodwinking.

Mr Wells: He has tonnes of guts.

Dr WATSON: He does not have any guts. He did not have the nerve to turn up to the Brookfield showgrounds on 16 July and explain his actions.

Mr Hegarty: Could he have got on a horse at Brookfield?

Dr WATSON: He would not know which end of the horse to get on to.

The fact is that a sizeable part of the 425,000 hectares covered by the Bill comprises two of the most popular horse riding areas in the south-east corner—Brisbane Forest Park and, as the member interjected earlier, Daisy Hill State Forest. They are the most popular areas because they are the only sizeable horse riding areas for people living in Brisbane. State forests are the only public lands open for horse riders. There is no evidence that any damage is caused by this sport. In fact, horse riders provide valuable assistance in the management of large areas such as forests. Does the Minister agree with that?

Mr Welford: I do.

Dr WATSON: Then the Minister should encourage it. For example, many riders go to remote parts of the Brisbane Forest Park where bush walkers or park rangers rarely get to. They are often able to report back on various matters that need attention such as feral animals, damage to perimeter fences and illegal activities.

Mr Hegarty interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Reeves): Order! The member for Moggill is on his feet. If the member for Redlands wants to make a contribution to this debate, there is ample opportunity for him to do so.

Dr WATSON: Horse riders are a help, not a hindrance, in the management of parks. In Brisbane Forest Park horse riders cause no environmental damage because they are using tracks and trails maintained for fire access. The argument that horse manure contributes to weed seed dispersion simply does not hold up when we consider that the main weed problem in Brisbane Forest Park is lantana. Anyone who knows anything about horses knows that they do not eat lantana.

There have been a large number of assurances made by the Labor Government that recreational users will not be adversely affected by the RFA and this subsequent Bill. In a press release dated 21 May last year the Minister for Environment, Heritage and Minister for Natural Resources acknowledged that there had been an explosion in demand by people living in the south-east for outdoor recreation opportunities in our national parks, council reserves, State forests and other natural settings. He went on to say that the Queensland Government is looking to expand the diversity of sustainable recreation and tourism opportunities, not reduce them.

I ask: how is locking up 425,000 hectares for future national parks supposed to expand recreation activities? It will not expand activities; it will reduce activities, because there is really only one

activity allowed in national parks and that is bushwalking. I enjoy bushwalking but what about the people who enjoy horse riding or mountain bike riding or trail bike riding or even simply taking their dog for a walk in the bush? None of those people will get a look-in in the future because this Bill caters only to the interests of the extreme greens. This Bill is very vague and hazy on a number of points.

In his second-reading speech delivered in this House on 22 June, the Minister said that this Bill was a significant step for nature conservation and nature-based recreation in Queensland. "Nature-based recreation" is an interesting term. I cannot know for sure one way or the other because nowhere in the Bill is the term "nature-based recreation" defined. In this Bill I think it means nothing more than bushwalking. I call on the Minister, instead of just sitting there and interjecting, to come clean and define exactly what he means by "nature-based recreation". That is the point that the member for Keppel made a few moments ago. I call on the Minister to make some real assurances, assurances enshrined in this legislation, that more than just bushwalkers will ultimately have access to the 425,000 hectares of south-east Queensland covered by this Bill.
