



Speech by
**Mr DENVER
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MEMBER FOR INDOOROOPIILLY

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NATURE CONSERVATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr BEANLAND (Indooroopilly—LP) (3.40 p.m.): This is a very sad day for all Queenslanders. The Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill is a piece of legislation that attacks people's rights to recreation, that is, their rights to undertake activities they have undertaken in many cases for decades. This legislation attacks their rights to recreation. This legislation is all about some 425,000 hectares of forest reserves that the Government proposes to transfer over to national parks of various types and descriptions. Those national parks come under a range of names—national park (scientific), national park (recovery), national park (conservation park), national park (forest reserve). But they are all national parks. There are five different categories of national park. At the end of the day we are talking about a transfer of an area of land across from the forest reserve into national parks of various types and descriptions.

I note that the Minister says that in addressing the issue there will be no net loss. However, although he has said there will be no net loss, he has been very careful not to indicate what that means. Is he saying there will be no net loss around Queensland in total? I am sure that is what he means at the end of the day. It is little use for the Minister to take away land, for example from Brisbane Forest Park, which borders suburbs of Brisbane and which at the moment might be used by recreational users, and putting in its place land several hundred miles away that people can use for recreational purposes, for example, for horse riding.

Land like this has been set aside now for decades—long before this Minister was around. I remember being part of the group that had the vision and helped to establish the Brisbane Forest Park. We know that this Government is not about vision; it is about nothing more and nothing less than ideology. There can be no other reason for it. The Minister has given no real indication why the Government is proposing to take this course of action. It is being done for the sake of ideology. The Minister has an opportunity to change the whole way in which people go about their recreation. The Minister still has an opportunity to change course. However, this legislation was rushed in here to be debated in the middle of the night. Out of the blue the Minister decided to bring forward this legislation

Mr Rowell: Half past 11.

Mr BEANLAND: Yes, at about 11 or 11.30 on a Thursday night the Minister rushed in this legislation to be debated in order to get it through. The fact is that this Government was prepared to rush it through. Time and time again we see that this Minister does not have the courage to come in here during the normal hours of business—during the day—to debate legislation. We have seen this Minister bring on legislation to be debated in the middle of the night.

Mr Lester: They wanted to take it right through.

Mr BEANLAND: The shadow Minister, the honourable member for Keppel, informs me that this Minister and this Government wanted to debate it through the night. They wanted to ram it through in the wee hours of the morning—probably 4, 6, 7 or 8 in the morning. That is what this Minister was prepared to do to get this legislation through. And it is little wonder; today the Minister did not have the courage to go out and face the protesters—the people who were not properly consulted.

Mr Welford: Yes, I did.

Mr BEANLAND: No, the Minister did not. He was not out there today consulting with them at all. He did not have what it took to go out and talk to them today.

Mr Welford: Watch the news.

Mr BEANLAND: We will see them on the news harassing and heckling the Minister, because he did not address their issues today at all. He failed. He has had weeks to address these issues, yet he did not. If one looks at the consultation process, one sees that the people at the grassroots level were not consulted in relation to this issue at all.

Mr Lester: They cheered me when I went out there.

Mr BEANLAND: The member for Keppel informs me that they cheered him when he went out to address them today, but that was not the case in relation to the Minister. He skulked out there today with his tail between his legs, and that is what we will see tonight on the news. I thank the Minister for reminding me of what we will see on the news tonight—the Minister skulking around with his tail between his legs. He had to be dragged out there.

In respect of the lack of consultation, I am reminded of a letter that I received from a group with an interest in horse riding in forest areas. I will read that letter, because it contains a number of pertinent points. This letter was addressed to a number of Government members, including the Premier. It states—

"Thank you for the reply from your Chief of Staff. He mentioned that the issue was in the hands of the Minister, Mr Welford. We have had responses from several of the Ministers in Cabinet but not Mr Welford."

Interestingly, the very Minister responsible did not have the courtesy to reply. The letter continues—

"So we would like to ask you again about the future that we have as horse riders who presently use state forest in the pursuit of our recreation.

The thought of any of the lands presently tenured as state forest being transferred to the NCA with its five tenures and the token Forest Reserve, which has a maximum life of five years is of considerable concern.

The government's standard response of being interested in all stakeholders offers little consolation when our meetings with representatives of the DNR give us no confidence that areas that are presently available to horse riders and other recreationists will continue to be so in the future.

Is the Government condoning and encouraging horse riders to pursue their recreation on the roads and verges?

Mr Welford has stated on several occasions that his main objective throughout the RFA—now the SEQFA—is to remove logging from native forests.

Is it the Government's intention to remove certain forms of recreation from the native forest areas as well?

The transfer of State Forests to the Nature Conservation Act management leaves little room for our kind of recreation.

The general public, including recreational users, would be more confident of the Government's care of these stakeholders should the current area of State Forest be transferred to the permanent tenure of Forest Reserve (remove the sunset clause). This would provide for a greater range of means of access than the National Park categories specified under the NCA amendments. Most tenures of National Park are usually special areas set aside with specific management criteria usually because of its sensitive ecological status or iconic value.

Of the 425000 hectares identified for transfer, how much really satisfies National Park status and management?

During Mr Welford's second reading speech for the Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2000 he explained the new tenure of the National Park Recovery. This tenure caters for the land destined for National Park status—but much of this land is currently covered with plantation trees! Following their removal and subsequent regeneration with native forest how can it be possible for such land to be upgraded to National Park?

Current management of National Parks in Queensland does not allow entry by horses. Are there any changes to legislation proposed to increase the range of recreational activities permitted within National Parks to include horse riding?

If not there are many Queenslanders who will have little safe opportunity to continue with their recreation. It is no doubt obvious in this day and age that leisure pursuits are crucial to the wellbeing of the individual. In addition many Queenslanders receive considerable income

from the costs incurred by those involved in such recreational activities in terms of vehicles and maintenance for the transport of horse and rider, fuel, associated items e.g. those provided through Produce Stores.

Queenslanders need their recreation and safe areas in which to enjoy their leisure pursuits. The change of tenure of State Forests to National Parks will severely restrict access to areas that have previously been enjoyed.

When the Bill goes for voting please consider the changes that we need. Thank you."

There are a number of questions raised in that letter that the Minister has not seen fit to answer previously. We look forward to reading in Hansard the answers given in the Minister's reply. There is a range of issues of concern not only to these people but also to a number of other people right around the State who have not been consulted let alone consulted adequately—they simply have not been consulted at all—in relation to this matter.

Those people want some answers because they believe that they are being short-changed—and I agree with them—in relation to this particular piece of legislation. It certainly trammels the rights of thousands of Queenslanders who are currently using those areas. Many of those areas were set up over decades to enable people to enjoy not only recreational pursuits but also the breathing space on the edge of urban areas, and of course Brisbane Forest Park is one of those. The visionaries responsible for the Brisbane Forest Park and other such sites who were in Government at the time, the former National/Liberal Governments of the day, went to great lengths to set them up. Now that vision is being crushed by this legislation following little or no consultation whatsoever. It is quite obvious from those comments that the Minister has not been out talking to those people.

It seems to me that, whenever we get this sort of legislation, the Labor Party idea of consultation is always starting with a number of Government departments. That might be nice for the Government public servants in the Government departments, but it is hardly considered consultation with the interest groups in the community. It is hardly consultation with the community at all. Then when it moves to the community groups, I notice that they are largely conservation groups. Sure, they do have a role in this matter, but there is only one real group that I can see as a recreation reference group. That group might be covering for a number of recreation groups, but at the end of the day it is purely one peak body. There is a whole range of recreational groups within that which should have been consulted and which have not been consulted at all.

Mr Welford, as the Minister responsible, should have been personally out there consulting. After all, what other way is there to consult than to consult with those groups in their own cities, towns and suburbs around the State? That is real consultation. We hear a lot about this Government going out to Community Cabinets. What a farce those Community Cabinet meetings are! Yet again it has been proved that those Community Cabinet meetings are a farce. I remember there was one up in the Kurwongbah electorate or in the Pine Rivers Shire not so long ago. Sure, there would have been people wanting to go there and talk about this in large numbers, but they were obviously not given the opportunity to be made aware of the meeting at the time. If they were—and quite a number of people went and talked to the Minister—he obviously has not addressed those concerns because quite a large number of people still have concerns. Even with little notice, people have been able to rally against this matter, because it really strikes at their rights and at the heart of their concerns about the use of those forest parks.

It is quite clear that we have not received answers from the Minister to date. There is still time and opportunity for this Minister to change his mind instead of locking up Queensland's national parks. We know that the Government is currently not prepared to allocate sufficient funds for maintenance of the current national parks. That goes for national parks whether they are in tourist areas or in recreational use areas. Whatever area of the State they are in, the Government is providing inadequate funding.

I constantly receive letters from my constituents who visit various national parks around the State complaining about the fact that there is not adequate maintenance. My colleagues in the National Party constantly receive similar complaints from land-holders, farmers and graziers in the vicinity of those national parks about the number of feral animals that are overrunning those areas, and of course the number of weeds that are taking over those areas as well—and noxious weeds at that! The Government simply does not have the resources to undertake the maintenance work that is currently required. Yet the Minister is going to add to those woes considerably.

I think this is a very important point. It is very easy to acquire land for national parks; that does not require a lot of nous or a lot of effort and energy. The Minister simply gets someone to draft a Bill and then he comes in here to this House and introduces it or he can do it by way of the other process we see occurring from time to time—by regulation. However, it does require a lot of effort to go out there and ensure that the right maintenance is being undertaken, to ensure that the feral animals are not running rife and overtaking those national parks and to ensure that noxious weeds are kept to a

minimum. That simply is not happening. The problem has been raised in this Chamber a number of times in the past—I am far from the first person to raise it—yet the Government continues down this track.

There are little or no additional funds provided. In fact, in the past this Government has at times cut back on funding for maintenance in those areas. We are not getting the services that are necessary and needed to keep those national parks in a respectable state. We know that many of the facilities in national parks that are frequented by tourists are in dire need of maintenance. A lot of the seating, tables and a whole range of other facilities in those areas are just simply collapsing and they are not being maintained at all.

There has been no indication at all that additional funding is going to be made available for this particular area. I see a number of statements in the Explanatory Notes. There are reasons for the Bill, objectives of the legislation, the way in which the policy objectives are to be achieved in the Bill, alternatives to the Bill and an assessment of the administrative cost to Government. I notice that, under Assessment of the administrative cost to Government, it says that there will be no administrative cost as it will continue to be administered by the existing agencies. It carries on as though there will be no additional costs at all. It says—

"Required funding has been determined at \$16 per hectare. This figure has been agreed to by Treasury and foreshadowed in budget estimates."

Of course, as we have said in the past, that is another example of this Government giving with one hand and taking away with the other, because the funding is totally inadequate currently and at this rate it is going to be totally inadequate in the future as well. The necessary allocation of funding for the maintenance of national parks generally in this State is woefully inadequate. By the Government's own indication here, it is going to continue to be woefully inadequate indeed and not catch up at any time in the foreseeable future.

There are a number of very valid reasons why the coalition is very, very concerned about this legislation. I look forward to hearing the Minister answer the questions I asked about matters that were raised in a letter written to me. I think they are very legitimate questions and I think some consideration needs to be given to the other issues which I and other speakers have raised in this place, because the Government is getting further and further behind when it comes to providing sufficient resources in order to maintain national parks. There is no point in the Minister saying that there is going to be an extra \$16 per hectare provided. That is not keeping pace with the needs of those national parks at all. In fact, it is allowing the situation to go from bad to worse. That is simply not good enough for Queenslanders. In decades past we have taken great pride in the work and the upgrade of our national parks and the way in which national parks have acted as recreational areas not only for the public but also for tourists.
