



Speech by

**Mrs D. PRATT**

**MEMBER FOR BARAMBAH**

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Hansard 17 October 2000

**NATURE CONSERVATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mrs PRATT** (Barambah—IND) (5 p.m.): It is obvious from the number of members who have risen to speak to the Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill today that the perceived impact of the Bill is causing a great deal of angst among the general populace. Unfortunately this Bill is ill conceived, although the Minister's intent must be acknowledged. As with many Bills brought into this House, due consideration to, and use of, the knowledge which is available did not occur. The Minister claims to have undertaken consultation with all of the relevant bodies, but in many instances we see the minority groups apparently in total control of the agenda. The Minister says that he has listened to the relevant groups. With all due respect to him, I have to ask: did he actually hear what was being said?

The knowledge of the long-time residents in the area is often dismissed—knowledge which has been built up over hundreds of years through flood, fire and drought conditions, the knowledge which has allowed the possessor to survive in industries and conditions which would see the average person in this place wither and die. The regional forest agreement dismissed the knowledge of the experienced for the theorists' recommendations often to the detriment of the industries involved and the general public.

I would like to quote from some correspondence I received, and I dare say all members received the same. It states—

"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?

Recreational users are requesting ongoing access to the retrospective holding of State forest area pre 1998 and to have that holding increased in the future.

We know that it is necessary to manage such a resource carefully to ensure it will be available to use in the future and to ensure the ecological sustainability of these areas.

But the Government should now consider the sustainability of the recreational users who participate in these legitimate recreation activities in State forests as a balance to their own hectic modern day living.

It would appear Mr Welford has taken advantage of parliamentary privilege by providing incorrect information when he claims in the second reading speech of the Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2000 that the end result was an agreement welcomed by all.

We can comment as representatives of a group of stakeholders that this is not so."

Some local government concerns—and there have been an awful lot—are as follows. The Queensland Local Government Association has expressed the view that communities are already experiencing an economic decline in many rural areas. The development of the RFA and similar

legislation has been identified as another example of a process or initiative that will have a negative impact on the economic situation of predominantly rural communities. It has also been recognised that the impacts on the employment base within local communities will be significant, and the association seeks State Government support to ensure there is no loss of employment as a result of this legislation.

Councillors have also expressed concern about the impact that this legislation will have on existing council planning schemes that are currently being drafted to include recreation and open spaces. The impact on grazing leases and other non-timber forest uses in council rate bases is unknown and, as such, is creating uncertainty within local communities, especially for land-holders. Councils have also expressed their concern about the impact of this on their rate base. Councils maintain that the forests have been sustainably managed to date with the existing sawlog timber allocations that have been applied.

There has been particular concern expressed as to why there is a need to transfer the management of forest reserves into national parks when, as reinforced by councils, they already manage it in a sustainable manner. The social issues have been addressed only in terms of losses of positions in the timber industry, and the additional job losses in the cattle grazing and apiary industries and in the tourist and recreational industries have been ignored. As grazing leaseholders generally pay the council rates, the effect of the reduction in the local government resources should be addressed also.

The forest grazing leaseholders have for generations maintained the noxious weeds and controlled the build-up of combustible material that threatens our State forests every fire season. With the intended closure of vast areas of forest, the proliferation of the noxious weeds and the building up of this combustible material will conceivably incur more damage in the long term than anyone could possibly imagine. It has to be asked of the Minister: what plans has he put in place to combat both of those major problems of the future?

The Minister must also realise that this will be a huge financial burden to any State Government of the future and that by reducing or eliminating grazing leases altogether he has removed from the Government a very valuable resource of voluntary labour. Such concerns from recreational councils, local government, grazing leaseholders and other recreational user groups belie the Minister's assertion that the end result was an agreement welcomed by all.

During the RFA process two major concerns of leasehold graziers in south-east Queensland were a lack of security of tenure and the management of leased country. As was often stated, the invasiveness of the eucalypt in south-east Queensland open forest grazing country is equivalent to the invasive nature of cypress in the south-west. As the unmanaged regrowth in both areas fails to create any marketable timber, the possibility of a joint venture arrangement between the State Government and leaseholders would greatly enhance the value of the natural regeneration. So the Minister can see that everybody who is in communication with me—and apparently most of the members of this House—is unhappy with the proposed legislation.

I would like to read from a newspaper clipping headed "Farmers 'at war' over vegetation". It states—

"Queensland's peak rural group has declared it is now in open conflict with the State Government over its vegetation management regime.

Queensland Farmers' Federation president Richard Armstrong said this week it was time for landholders to take a united stand against Government action which was patently unfair on country people."

It goes on—

" 'It is not as if the Government can't find the money if it is serious about vegetation management.

The question is one of priorities,' Mr Armstrong said.

'There are plenty of public dollars for dubious projects like football stadiums and footbridges over the Brisbane River.

The Government has made no serious attempt to see how its legislation will hurt individual producers ...' "

I rise to ask the members of this Government to be big enough to admit that they have made an error of making too much haste in promoting and tabling this legislation, especially when the groups involved do not agree with the Minister that there has been proper and due consultation with the very people on whom this legislation will have the ultimate and perhaps the most devastating of impacts. There is no-one who does not believe that the issue concerning the protection of our vast ecological resources is of utmost importance and needs addressing. No-one denies it at all. There is not a farmer, a grazier or a member of the general public who does not understand the necessity for conservation.

Recreational users generally value their recreational facilities more than any other person who does not visit those forests or reserves regularly. It is not they who generally light the match that devastates vast acreages, nor is it those who live near or make a living from these areas; it is the ignorant, often thoughtless, visitor from larger towns and cities who leaves their damaging imprint on the landscape. It is time that this was addressed appropriately and with due consideration given to all parties. It is because I do not believe that has been done and because of the will of the people of my electorate that I oppose this Bill.

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