



Speech by

Mr TIM MULHERIN

MEMBER FOR MACKAY

Hansard 17 May 2000

NATIONAL PARK ESTATE

Mr MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (6.28 p.m.): What a doozey of a debate! We have all just been enlightened by the member for Keppel, the Opposition spokesperson on national parks, who stated that his greatest contribution to national parks was that he put fish in the Fairbairn Dam! The member for Keppel does not know the difference between a dam and national park. It is no wonder we are debating this issue when we hear comments such as that from the Opposition spokesperson. It shows that the National Party failed to address the issue of national parks during its three years in Government.

One of the reasons we are having this debate is that the National Party ran down the national parks service so badly that it is still recovering. In fact, the National Party has been in control of national parks in this State for in excess of 32 years out of the last 40. In June 1998 the Beattie Government took over an Environment Department and a national parks service ignored by the National Party and which had suffered three years of crazy ideas ranging from privatising camping grounds to introducing entrance fees.

Quite frankly, the Environment Department and the parks service were devastated. Morale was shot, resources had been run into the ground and there was no plan for the future. Thank God that a visionary Minister, the Honourable Rod Welford, changed all of that. We now have an Environmental Protection Agency restoring responsible environmental management in Queensland. The EPA has opened the way for real and long-term improvements to the way our State develops and to the quality of life we can create in both urban and rural areas.

It is forging partnerships with business, industry and the community to promote responsible and sustainable development. A couple of weeks ago I had a meeting in Mackay with stakeholders representing various Government agencies, dairy farmers and the operators of Eungella National Park. We sat down and looked at the issues and mapped out a strategy which will include a community advisory group overseeing the management of the park. This is part of the Minister's plan to help business and industry create secure and sustainable jobs.

At the same time, the Parks and Wildlife Service has been given a new lease of life and this Government has signalled its intention to manage and look after these priceless assets better than ever before. It was this Government that put into place a master planning process, inviting all stakeholders to become involved in strategies for the future.

The Local Government Association of Queensland is one of the stakeholders involved in that process. It is well aware that this process will involve extensive public consultation over the next six months and will deal with a whole range of issues regarding our parks. The LGAQ has a genuine interest in our parks and the Government will take on board the comments in this report. The LGAQ is also well aware that these issues are being dealt with in a much more comprehensive way as part of the master planning process.

The fact that the Opposition is trying to use the LGAQ's report to gain political capital demonstrates yet again how bereft is the National Party of ideas. I am not surprised that those opposite are grabbing this report because the National Party never had one good idea about our national parks. Those opposite talk about under-resourcing of our national parks. What was the term the coalition used

when it was in Government? How did those opposite explain their own under-resourcing? How the language changes when one is in Opposition.

In 1996, the National Party handed Queensland an Environment Department and a national parks service that was on its knees. Those opposite made underresourcing an art form. What this Government has been doing is fixing what the coalition broke. Those opposite know that it cannot happen overnight because they spent three years tearing down the service. The service had been neglected for 32 years while the coalition was in Government.

As the Minister said, budgets were cut, staff were sacked, programs were abandoned and the only new strategy was to give away parks and services to commercial operators. The Goss Government took protection of our national estate and our biodiversity to the sort of level that one would expect in a State with such magnificent resources. The Borbidge Government undid all this good work and sent us spiralling backwards. In fact, the coalition did such a good job that it is going to take a while for Queensland to recover. I am pleased that the member for Keppel raised the question of underresourcing in this debate tonight because it allows Queenslanders to hear how the National Party has no ideas for our parks service. I want to make sure that all Queenslanders remember how the National Party planned to look after our parks—the great park pass, double-dipping our taxpayers. Under the National Party, Queenslanders would not have been allowed into our national parks unless they put their hands in their pockets. We know how members of the National Party put their hands in their pockets for our national parks.
