



Speech by

Hon. S. ROBERTSON

MEMBER FOR STRETTON

Hansard 11 December 2001

LAND PROTECTION (PEST AND STOCK ROUTE MANAGEMENT) BILL

Hon. S. ROBERTSON (Stretton—ALP) (Minister for Natural Resources and Minister for Mines) (12.32 p.m.): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

The Rural Lands Protection Act 1985 has been the subject of a review that commenced in 1994, which has highlighted the need for a more modern legislative approach to pest and stock route management. Such an approach should take advantage of new consultative planning approaches and partnerships and provide better guidance for communities, industries, the state and local governments within Queensland. The bill proposes to achieve that desired legislative approach and replaces the Rural Lands Protection Act 1985.

Pest plants and animals cost Queensland over \$600 million annually in lost production and in control costs. These pests also threaten the environment, impact adversely on recreation, amenity and ecotourism, and some affect human health. Weeds are one of the greatest causes of biodiversity loss. Pests affect the whole community and the long-term consequences of not controlling them effectively will harm every one of us in many ways.

The stock route network in Queensland is a substantial public asset and consists of approximately 72,000 kilometres of land corridor traversing many of Queensland's biogeographical regions. There is a pressing need to manage the natural resources on the network for future generations while continuing to cater for the current needs of travelling stock. Other public purposes of stock routes, such as road transport, utilities and communications, must also be serviced. The bill establishes a management framework for the network that preserves its existing functionality and biodiversity and ensures its sustainability for future generations.

The bill deals with weed and pest management within Queensland above the high-water mark and the purpose is to protect the resources of the state. The bill, like its predecessor legislation, does not deal with every pest. Pest plants and animals covered by the bill include exotic invasive weeds, exotic pest animals—including wild dogs and dingoes—and indigenous species of locusts.

The focus of the bill changes from solely pests of primary production under the Rural Lands Protection Act to include those that have adverse impacts on the environment, society or other economic activities, such as ecotourism. The problems caused by environmental weeds are specifically addressed for the first time. The sale of certain invasive plants will be able to be banned. The bill also protects environmentally significant areas threatened by pests on adjacent private land. The bill establishes principles to provide direction for future pest and stock route management.

State strategies will be developed for weeds, pest animals and the stock route network. The principles are also to be considered in the planning and policy processes to be undertaken by state departments for land they control and by local governments for their administrative areas. The bill establishes a framework that is designed to achieve effective pest management and effective management of the stock route network.

The bill introduces local government area pest management planning already practised by some of our most forward looking councils and which will bring community knowledge and participation into the process of tackling important local pest issues. The same planning process is introduced for

those councils with stock routes. Increased community participation is another feature of this bill. Plans benefit from community input and generate support and resources. They order priorities and actions, set targets and performance measures and lead to more accountability.

Community involvement should also ensure increased knowledge of pest and stock route management issues, more effective implementation of plans and better reporting on performance. The bill provides an opportunity for partnerships in pest and stock route management for more effective action on the issues of greatest concern in the community. Local government area plans must also take account of state, regional or catchment level natural resource management plans and those developed by neighbouring local governments.

Prevention is a key principle in pest management. A policy objective is to minimise the introduction, keeping and sale of pests and to prevent their spread, including by human activity. Many weeds are extremely invasive and are spread by water, wind and animals, including birds. The process to declare a pest species will be by a regulation. The effect of declaration will be to ban the sale or keeping of the pest in most circumstances, to create obligations for landowners and to create offences relating to spreading pests. These obligations will vary according to the category of declaration and those guidelines specifying the management requirements for the pest that have been published by the department.

If a product is contaminated with a weed pest specified by regulation, the seller must declare this risk in writing to the purchaser. There will be a requirement to wash down or clean vehicles or machinery, which are leaving pest infested sites, and to contain products against spillage or release of seeds or reproductive material of declared pests.

To cope with new incursions into Queensland, an emergency declaration of a new pest may be made for up to three months and this will give a range of powers to control the pest upon private land. Property quarantine powers will be available for serious pest infestations. Natural resource management upon the stock route network will be improved through local government area stock route management plans as well as through monitoring the condition of pasture, using controlled grazing and the burning of pasture and rehabilitating degraded sites on the network.

Permits for agistment on stock routes will be available only when pasture and water is more than sufficient for travelling stock and the management plan supports grazing of the area. The owners of the stock must meet eligibility criteria: for example, the owner's land might be affected by drought, fire or flood. Permits can only be issued on the same land for the permit holder for a period up to two months.

The bill seeks to continue the partnership in pest and stock route management between the state and local government. It has been developed with an extensive process of consultation and stakeholder input, especially from local governments. That process included a legislation reference panel established to propose solutions to particular issues of concerns. I commend the bill to the House.
