



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR CUNNINGHAM

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APPROPRIATION BILLS [ESTIMATES COMMITTEE D]

Mr COPELAND (Cunningham—NPA) (11.46 a.m.): I rise in place of the member for Keppel who has had to attend a funeral this morning. He passes on his apologies for not being here. I am very happy to rise to speak about Estimates Committee D. Environment is an increasingly important portfolio in terms of the awareness of the environment right across our society. Certainly younger people have a much greater awareness of environmental issues than was the case 10, 15 or 20 years ago. That process will continue.

The environment is certainly an issue that all of us in the National Party have a very great concern for. I think it is a very erroneous statement that the National Party does not care for the environment, because it is something that is utmost in all of our minds and something we are all very concerned with. I think everyone in the National Party has at some stage had dealings with organisations such as Landcare and other organisations looking after integrated catchment management. All of us see those as being very practical ways of addressing the very real problems that are facing our environment—not only talking about it, not only having airy-fairy discussions, but also having some really practical, down to earth solutions to some of these problems to make sure that we do protect a resource for generations to come. It is something that I know we will continue to do. We will ensure that commonsense and practicalities are taken into account when we talk about the environment and the Department of the Environment.

I think integrated catchment management is a very important process that is becoming more and more widespread. I know in my own area that the Condamine Catchment Management Association is doing some excellent work and taking into account all of the natural resource management issues in that area. In my area it is the Upper Condamine under the stewardship of Bobby Brazil, the chair of that organisation. They are doing a fantastic job in achieving real outcomes in managing the environment and balancing the needs of the environment with the needs of the people who earn a living from that area. It is something we will continue to do.

Landcare is an organisation that has been having some phenomenal success over the years. That really has come out of the concern that farmers and primary producers have had to preserve what they see as their future, to make sure they do have a future.

Mr Malone: Jock Douglas set that up.

Mr COPELAND: That is right. As the member for Mirani said, Jock Douglas set up that organisation. It has gone from strength to strength and it is widely respected on all sides of politics for the very real achievements it has made and continues to make. They are the sorts of organisations that can really make a difference on the ground.

Salinity is something we are all concerned with. We have seen what has happened in other states. Salinity is something those catchment management associations, Landcare and so on, are really concerned with. More importantly, the farmers on the ground, who are really at the coalface, are also concerned with it. They are implementing practices that will ensure the environment is protected and their income source for the future is protected. It is something we should recognise and not denigrate, which obviously happens on many occasions.

There is one very real problem that exists, and it is certainly of concern to all members of the National Party opposition. I refer to the management of national parks. There has been a great increase in the number of national parks in recent years, but there has not been a corresponding increase in the resources to look after those national parks. This is something that is vitally needed, not only for the management of the parks but also for those people who live around the parks and those

people who use the parks. We have seen the infiltration of those parks by noxious weeds, feral animals and all sorts of things, which are going absolutely rampant in those areas. The Department of Environment simply does not have the resources required to effectively manage them—for example, the problems with wild pigs, woody weeds and all those sorts of things.

If there is one real threat to our environment and our wealth as a nation it is the fact that there are so many feral animals out there. And given the threats that we have seen in Europe and some parts of Asia with foot-and-mouth disease, for example, if we were to have an incursion of that disease into our national parks and it was to get into the feral animals in national parks, we would have a multibillion-dollar problem on our hands—not only a problem for the people who earn their living in primary production but also a problem for the environment and the money and the resources that are available for the environment.

We must always be concerned about having sustainable development in our community. But we also must say that, if there is a public good to preserving the environment, the public in some cases will have to pay for preserving or restricting some of the uses or rights that primary producers have at the moment.
