



Speech by

**Dr DAVID WATSON**

**MEMBER FOR MOGGILL**

---

Hansard 10 April 2002

**LAND PROTECTION [PEST AND STOCK ROUTE MANAGEMENT] BILL**

**Dr WATSON** (Moggill—Lib) (12.26 p.m.): In speaking to the Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Bill, I wish to refer briefly to part 4 of the bill which deals with the issue of local government management areas. I support this section because I think it is pretty important that local governments prepare local area pest management plans. It is something that we have been doing in Moggill for some time. I have spoken to the minister on this subject and he is aware that the issue of feral dogs has plagued the Moggill area for some time. I have been working with the local councillor and with the former Department of Environment and Natural Resources, DNR, for the last two years.

As early as March 2000 I wrote to Rod Welford when he was the minister and he responded. Later that year I wrote to him again on the issue of funding. Briefly, what I wrote to the minister was as follows—

As you are aware, there has been an on-going program in place to remove these animals. Mr Scott O'Keefe from your Department has been working closely with residents to try to resolve this issue and my constituents have been very pleased with Mr O'Keefe's handling of the whole process.

However, I have been informed that Mr O'Keefe will be leaving the Department at the end of the year and, naturally, my constituents are very concerned about what will happen to this program once Mr O'Keefe has left the Department.

This is not an issue which will be resolved quickly and my constituents would like an assurance from you that this program will continue in order that a solution can eventually be reached.

The minister at the time responded in a positive fashion. I will quote from his letter because it is important that we understand that I have received a very good response from the department every time I raised the issue. The minister wrote—

My Department of Natural Resources, through Mr O'Keefe, has been developing the necessary skills within the community in the Woodcrest Estate area to enable the ongoing control of feral dogs in the area. My Department's strategy has been to properly inform the local community about the options available and how to implement effective control mechanisms. Mr O'Keefe's work also included gaining Brisbane City Council's support in the control of these feral dogs. Brisbane City Council has offered to provide administrative support to the community in their on-going efforts to control the feral dogs.

From my Department's perspective, we will continue to provide on-going support through the involvement of Land Protection Officer support to the community group to provide technical advice and skills that may be required from time to time to maintain the control strategy. Predominantly my Department will assist in the coordination of the long-term strategy involving both Brisbane City Council and the community group.

I share your concern about the impact feral dogs may have in an urban environment and I will continue to support the action of the community. My Department will continue to provide advice and assistance where necessary, to ensure a sustainable control program is delivered in the area.

Right from the word go there has been an attempt by both the Department and myself to address this problem in a practical and bipartisan fashion. I raised this issue of feral dogs with the minister after that tragic affair on Fraser Island. I have been very pleased with the response I have received from the current minister and the director-general of the department.

In a moment I will address the issue of the long-term employment of Mr Scott O'Keefe. He is contracted only to May. Continual short-term contracting is a management issue I will come back to after I say what we have done. During the last two years in the area we have had a series of public meetings. Scott O'Keefe has been very instrumental in organising them and making sure they work. Secondly, in conjunction with the local community we developed a culling procedure. The department employed a professional shooter to come in and actually cull the

dogs. Unfortunately, on the day of the cull one of the other environmental groups in the area went out to plant and water trees right across the area in which the cull was to take place. Of course that constrained the shooter, so that did not actually work particularly well. Since then we have developed a local area management plan.

I have had a number of meetings with Scott O'Keefe, Councillor de Wit and the leaders of some community groups. I understand that that local area management plan has now gone to the Brisbane City Council. The council has indicated that it is willing to put six officers in for training. Part of the plan was to train local government officers to go out and do things.

With the help of the department we put out a pamphlet on preventing wild dog problems. That was distributed from my electorate office. The minister may not have seen it, but the information came from the department. I worked with the department on it, and we actually got material out into the electorate in an effort to control the issue. We are trying to get people to act in a responsible fashion and inform them of a whole lot of things they should or should not do.

**Mr Robertson:** But your name is on it.

**Dr WATSON:** There are no names on it. Quite clearly, the people to contact are DNR and the city council. All I did was provide the resources as a community service.

**Mr Robertson:** As you do.

**Dr WATSON:** As you do. The issue that keeps coming up is continuity with respect to Scott O'Keefe's contract. I do not know the details, but I believe he has had two or three contracts, all of three to five months duration. No-one knows whether he will be around for a longer period. Having worked with him I can say that he is knowledgeable, courteous and hardworking. I suggest, if it is possible, that he be retained on a two- to five-year contract so that there is some continuity so that people know he will be there. One of the problems in getting council officers trained is that Scott cannot make a commitment that he will be available for training in three or four months time. Instead of retaining him on contracts of two, three, five or six months, I ask the minister for some continuity.

The second issue that has arisen recently—it has arisen partly because the Brisbane City Council has the plan and it is prepared to put in some officers—is that the procedures relating to what is acceptable in terms of trapping have gone from the RSPCA to the Department of Primary Industries. DPI has decided in relation to some of the trapping procedures agreed to by the RSPCA that it wants to look at its own protocols and procedures. The department is going back and investigating all of these procedures which have been deemed acceptable by the RSPCA for quite some time. I have no problem in theory with the Department of Primary Industries saying that it wants to make sure. The problem is that it is taking months. Until those issues are resolved, training of Brisbane City Council officers on trapping procedures cannot take place.

These are just a couple of practical issues. We fully support what the department seeks to do. We appreciate the cooperation we have seen from DNR and we appreciate the funding, but in order to progress the issue as far as possible we need some continuity with respect to the funding and resolution of some of the bureaucratic issues involving the department of one of the minister's colleagues. If those issues were addressed we could have a positive impact, not only in Moggill but right around south-east Queensland and right up to Caboolture. I know that Scott O'Keefe is doing things up there with some of the other members.