



Speech by

Hon. D. WELLS

MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

Hansard 7 November 2002

ENVIRONMENTAL LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Hon. D. M. WELLS (Murrumba—ALP) (Minister for Environment) (11.59 a.m.): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

The bill provides for amendments to five environmental management related statutes as a package to continue the environmental reforms of the government. While these amendments do not constitute major changes to the legislation, they further refine the way in which the legislation can benefit conservation and the public enjoyment of Queensland's parks and forests.

The first of these amendments relates to the Brisbane Forest Park Act 1977. It provides for the administration authority established under the act to appoint persons as authorised officers. The bill also provides such officers with a range of enforcement and investigatory powers to ensure enjoyment of the park's recreation facilities and natural features. Provisions of this nature were previously contained in the Brisbane Forest Park by-laws. The government believes it appropriate that matters such as powers for authorised officers be contained in primary rather than subordinate legislation.

The bill also provides for a number of amendments to the Forestry Act 1959. Preparations have been made to transfer the issue of infringement notices under the act to the government's successful State Penalties Enforcement Registry Scheme, commonly known as SPERS. Once the associated regulation is made under the State Penalties Enforcement Act 1999, it will provide for more efficient dealings with unpaid infringement notices and is expected to reduce the amount of court time involved in enforcing the infringement notice system. Provision has also been made to ensure that where camping fees for self-registration at state forest camping areas are paid for by nominating a credit card number on the camping form, permission to camp is only deemed to be granted if the relevant financial institution authorises the payment. This will alleviate a problem that has arisen whereby misuse of credit cards in some circumstances has resulted in persons not contributing to the user-pays system that returns camping fees to the facility management program. While the majority of visitors using this convenient method of payment use their credit cards appropriately, there is a need for the Environmental Protection Agency to be able to respond to circumstances of misuse.

The Meaker Trust (Raine Island Research) Act 1981 is also amended by this bill. Raine Island is a vegetated coral cay, approximately 30 hectares in area. It is located about 620 kilometres north-north-west of Cairns at the outer edge of the Great Barrier Reef. Moulter and MacLennan Cays, similar but smaller coral cays, are situated nearby. Together, these three cays comprise an area of international significance—the Raine Island Nature Refuge. This nature refuge holds highly significant natural and cultural heritage values. It is—

- the nesting site for the world's largest remaining green turtle population.

Mrs Reilly: Dean the green.

Mr WELLS: I take that interjection by the honourable member for Mudgeeraba. It may very well be that that is where Dean the green has gone.

- the most significant seabird rookery in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area;
- the site of the oldest European structure in tropical Australia, a stone navigational tower constructed in 1844 using convict labour; and
- a place of significance to the Wuthathi people and Torres Strait Islanders.

In 1981, the Raine Island Corporation was established under the Meaker Trust (Raine Island Research) Act 1981 to promote research and conservation on the nature and environment of Raine Island, Moulter and Maclellan Cays and the surrounding seas. The corporation manages access to the nature refuge in conjunction with the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, as the trustee of Raine Island. The Environmental Protection Agency has day-to-day management responsibilities for the area. The corporation is a nonprofit, self-funding statutory body, established with a generous donation from the Benjamin Meaker Charities Trust (Jersey). Income from the corporation's investments is used to fund its research and conservation activities.

The proposed amendments to the Meaker Trust (Raine Island Research) Act 1981 will vary membership of the corporation to—

- an additional person with pre-eminent scientific or conservation qualifications;
- a representative of the general community with a demonstrated interest in conservation and financial or fundraising skills; and
- an Aboriginal person who has, under Aboriginal tradition, a connection with the area or who is the chairperson of the Wuthathi Land Trust. This will increase the involvement of indigenous Australians in the conservation and management of this nature refuge.

In addition, the membership position currently designated for a Torres Strait Islander will be rewritten to provide for the appointment of a Torres Strait Islander who has, under island custom, a connection with the area or who is the chairperson of the Torres Strait Regional Authority.

The proposed amendments will also provide for the ongoing membership of the Butler family. The bill also amends the Nature Conservation Act 1992, Queensland's principal legislation for the protection and management of national parks and other protected areas. The amendments to the Nature Conservation Act include the addition of the ability to manage and protect cultural resources that may occur in a nature refuge.

Under the existing provisions of the act, the management focus of a nature refuge is on the natural resources of the area. This limits the opportunity for the state and the land-holder to enter into a conservation agreement to protect and manage important cultural resources that may also be present. The proposed amendment creates an opportunity to better protect these resources for future generations.

The Nature Conservation Act amendments also remove the requirement for the chief executive of the Environmental Protection Agency to keep a register covering matters such as protected areas, protected wildlife and prohibited wildlife. The information required to be kept in this register is already included in schedules made under regulations and is therefore available to interested parties from the government printer.

The final statute amended by the bill, other than several minor and inconsequential changes to the Beach Protection Act 1968 and the Newstead House Trust Act 1939, is the Transport Infrastructure Act 1994. The proposed amendment provides for a 12-month continuance of certain provisions of the Harbours Act 1955 until the Coastal Protection and Management and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2001 commences. These provisions deal with approval of works in tidal waters. I commend this bill to the House.

Debate, on motion of Mr Seeney, adjourned.