



Speech by

Hon. D. WELLS

MEMBER FOR MURRUMBIDGE

Hansard 5 December 2002

REVOCATION OF STATE FOREST AREAS

Hon. D. M. WELLS (Murrumbidgee—ALP) (Minister for Environment) (11.30 a.m.): I move—

- (1) That this House requests the Governor in Council to make a revocation by regulation of dedicated protected areas under the Nature Conservation Act 1992 as follows—
 - (a) that part of Goodnight Scrub National Park described as Lot 1 on AP9886 and containing an area of about 55 hectares, and
 - (b) that part of Goodnight Scrub Resources Reserve described as Lot 2 on AP9887 and containing an area of about 425 hectares.
- (2) That Mr Speaker forward a copy of this resolution to the Minister for Environment for submission to the Governor in Council.

Honourable members would be aware that the environmental impact statement for the proposed Burnett River dam identified that the project would affect certain sections of the Goodnight Scrub National Park and the adjacent Goodnight Scrub Resources Reserve, both being protected areas under the provisions of the Nature Conservation Act 1992.

The Nature Conservation Act provides for the Governor in Council, by regulation, to revoke a protected area, including a national park or resource reserve, in whole or in part. The regulation can be made only after the Legislative Assembly has passed a resolution requesting that the Governor in Council make a revocation on a motion for which at least 14 days notice has been given. The revocation of the affected areas of the national park and resources reserve is required prior to the commencement of the project. Following revocation, the land would revert to unallocated state land.

The Department of Natural Resources and Mines would have responsibility for any dealings with the land under the provisions of the Land Act 1994 and the Commonwealth Native Title Act 1993. The Environmental Protection Agency would be relieved of liability arising from activities that occur in the area between the full supply level of the dam and the 78-metre contour level.

The project requires the revocation of up to the 78-metre contour of areas of the Goodnight Scrub National Park and the adjacent resources reserve. Revocation of a combined area of about 480 hectares is required, which comprises some 55 hectares of the national park and about 425 hectares of the resource reserve. The balance of the resource reserve, approximately 360 hectares, had already been converted to national park prior to this proposed revocation.

To enable the government's targeted construction commencement date of the dam for late 2003 to be met, it is important that the revocation be finalised as soon as possible. Under the current schedule of Burnett Water Pty Ltd, access to the land for detailed geotechnical investigation within the current national park and adjacent resources reserve is required early in 2003. Hydrological modelling identifies this area as being affected from time to time by floodwaters and the operation of the dam. In future, such risks in this area would be managed by the dam operator, Burnett Water Pty Ltd.

The vegetation communities and habitat between the full supply level and the 78-metre contour level will remain largely intact as Burnett Water Pty Ltd will not clear vegetation in this area. Where appropriate, it may be revegetated with local native species. Burnett Water Pty Ltd is in the process of developing strategies to address the impacts of the dam on flora and fauna as required by the state and Commonwealth mandatory conditions arising from the environmental impact statement process. These strategies will include action to address the revegetation and restoration of areas adjacent to the dam and protected areas.

The Coordinator-General has facilitated the development of the Burnett program of actions to address the need for an integrated package of environmental measures to address longstanding water quality, aquatic fauna, sediment management and flow management issues across the Burnett catchment. The program was developed by Burnett Water Pty Ltd, the Department of Primary Industries, the Department of Natural Resources and Mines and the Environmental Protection Agency. A particular focus of the Burnett program of actions will be the implementation of research by these government departments and other measures to ensure that populations of the rare freshwater turtle and internationally recognised lungfish continue to survive in the Burnett River.

I will now summarise the implications of the proposed Burnett River dam project. When the Goodnight Scrub National Park was dedicated in 1998, it was known that inundation was planned for areas adjacent to the proposed dam site on the Burnett River. The resources reserve was created so that the option of the dam remained viable. The intended dam site is now further upstream than originally planned. About 360 hectares of the resources reserve have recently been added to the national park. To progress the dam project, 55 hectares need to be revoked from the national park and 425 hectares revoked from the resources reserve. Burnett Water Pty Ltd will be purchasing at least 110 hectares to replace the 55 hectares being revoked from the national park. The final result will be that the Goodnight Scrub National Park increases in area by a minimum of 450 hectares. In addition, Burnett Water Pty Ltd is providing funds to the Environmental Protection Agency to purchase additional land for national parks in high conservation value areas.

This is not the decision to build the Paradise Dam. That decision was made some considerable time ago. This is a decision to take the opportunity, which is now presenting itself, to enhance the Goodnight Scrub National Park. In conclusion, there is no feasible alternative to the proposed revocations if the Burnett dam is to proceed and risks to the project schedule are to be minimised. At the same time, steps have been taken to ensure that conservation values are retained and enhanced and additional lands are included in our national park.