



Speech by

DESLEY BOYLE

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

Hansard 30 April 2003

LAND LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (4.34 p.m.): I endorse the sentiments of many members of this House, particularly those of the previous speaker, the member for Hervey Bay. I am pleased indeed to support the Land Legislation Amendment Bill 2003 and all of the provisions of the bill, though it is the protection of Shelburne Bay about which I wish to speak this afternoon.

I had approached my words to the House this afternoon fairly casually, sure that all honourable members of this House would see how important is the action we are taking in the protection of Shelburne Bay. However, I have been reminded by the presentation of the member for Tablelands that we are taking action that others would not take and of how important it is that we take this opportunity as a Labor government to put these protections in place, because there are others with absolutely irrational or blind views so far as areas of environmental significance are concerned.

I will read some facts into the record, because many of the matters stated by the member for Tablelands were in fact in error. I will start with recognising that Shelburne Bay is an area of extraordinary environmental significance. That is not argued. In fact, Cape York Peninsula in its entirety is an area of unique significance. That, too, is not really argued, though it is regarded, I admit, as somewhat of a nuisance by some of those who have business interests in the cape, who would prefer that the world would go away, leave them alone and let them get on with the activities that they think will bring them an income, regardless of whether those activities may in fact put at risk an environment that is truly precious and of importance not only to Queensland or Australia but also to the world. It is a precious wilderness in the Cape York Peninsula. That is why we have been working in partnership with the Commonwealth government on the Cape York Peninsula land use study, including all of the stakeholders and recognising also the native title entitlements that must be part of any decisions.

The major obstacle to the complete protection of Shelburne Bay has been the continued existence of two mining leases which were originally granted in February 1975, some 28 years ago. They were subsequently renewed for further 14-year terms in 1989. These leases have never been mined. The outcry against sandmining in Shelburne Bay has come from many quarters. Yes, it has come from recognised green organisations such as the Wilderness Society, the Australian Conservation Foundation and the Queensland Greens, but it has come from further afield than that. I know that there are those such as the member for Tablelands who, as soon as they hear the word 'green' or hear of any of the green political groups, brush the issue aside, do not attend to it and regard it therefore as something irrational and something cared about only by a minority of people in the extreme. This is grossly unfair, of course, to many in the green movements who have devoted their lives and their careers to the scientific study of the environment and to important areas such as Shelburne Bay.

I am very proud to say that in the electorate of Cairns the great majority of people of all age groups, whether members of the Australian Conservation Foundation, the Wilderness Society or our local organisation, CAFNEC, are very green in their politics. I am particularly pleased to recognise the high proportion of young people, particularly those under 25, who would charge me as their representative with taking action on conservation issues and would absolutely cheer the government's initiative so far as Shelburne Bay is concerned.

I am proud that our government has taken other initiatives particularly relevant in the north, to the precious environment in which Cairns and far-north Queensland are situated. We have a reef protection plan, and we are working further on that. We have had difficulty with the Great Barrier Reef in

terms of balancing the dynamics of its fame and its appeal to visitors from around the world with protection against degradation, being mindful of the tremendous economic imperatives there are for businesses, mostly in the tourism and diving area, that have been founded on the basis of sharing this wonderful resource that is the Great Barrier Reef with people from around the world.

Beyond continuing our work with the reef protection plan, our crown-of-thorns starfish eradication program, particularly the importance of run-off and its effects on the Great Barrier Reef, I am proud too of the purchase we made during the last term of the Beattie government of the East Trinity land opposite Cairns on the Yarrabah peninsula. I am told it is quite recent that the honourable member for Robina, the Leader of the Liberal Party, asked whether this government puts the environment ahead of potential lease revenue. He was at the time, as I understand it, referring to mining leases but it is a question that I am proud to join the government in answering, and that is that the environment comes ahead of revenue—lease revenue and other revenue. Of course it does and it must. In terms of our actions on the Great Barrier Reef, our action with the East Trinity land and the remediation of acid sulfate problems and today our action in terms of Shelburne Bay, we can stand proud indeed.

We are ridding ourselves of the impediments of those two mining leases, but that is not all the action we are taking in regard to Shelburne Bay. The first stage of the guarantee of protection for Shelburne Bay already exists through restricted area No. 168 that was gazetted under the provisions of the Mineral Resource Regulation 1990. The restricted area will remain in place now until the government determines the best way to ensure complete protection of Shelburne. This prohibits any applications for or grants of a mining tenement in the future.

The proposed amendment to the Mineral Resources Act within this bill builds on this by providing that the two remaining mining leases in Shelburne Bay be cancelled. It would be completely nonsensical to renew these leases knowing full well that the land has never been mined and will never be mined. Despite the fact that we have a conservative government in Canberra not known always for its green credentials, nonetheless we can be reasonably sure the Commonwealth government would not be so short-sighted, so unthinking as to permit sandmining at Shelburne Bay.

I want to make it completely clear that this provision will affect only these two mining leases. No precedent is being set with regard to other mining leases. The situation at Shelburne is as unique as Shelburne is itself and requires a specific and tailored solution. There are other amendments in the bill and I support all of them, but I am pleased today to recognise the important action we are taking with regard to the protection of Shelburne Bay.