



Speech by

**Mrs D. PRATT**

**MEMBER FOR NANANGO**

---

Hansard 26 November 2003

**ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**  
**ENVIRONMENTAL LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mrs PRATT** (Nanango—Ind) (9.19 p.m.): I rise to participate in the cognate debate on the Environmental Protection Legislation Amendment Bill 2003 and the Environmental Legislation Amendment Bill 2003. The aim of the legislation is to reduce red tape over environmental issues. This is very welcome, because the whole environmental issue has become very confusing for many people and recent environmental related legislation passed in this House has further confused the issue, especially those related to developmental approvals, registration and approvals under the integrated development assessment system, or IDAS.

Any move by the government to simplify the requirements currently duplicated under the approval process promises, according to the minister, to produce cost savings to both the administering authorities and the industries concerned, and I hope with all my heart that that is correct and will occur. If, as the minister also says, the legislation will facilitate business opportunities by reducing processing delays while still protecting Queensland's legislation, then that is also a commendable aim of the legislation. However, if the codes for this legislation are to be developed with key stakeholders—government, peak industry and community representatives—as it has in the past, that causes me some concern as to exactly who the government is talking to.

In the past the government has continually claimed that there has been consultation when it has formulated several key pieces of legislation, especially with regard to water usage and land care. Unfortunately, many individuals who own land suffer because due consideration is not given to the individuals themselves—that is, those affected by the legislation or regulations that are imposed. Members would have possibly seen the case of Henry Brockhurst, a 94-year-old bachelor who lives by himself in a little old hut with no electricity as he has done for a long time on his 1,000 acres. This 94-year-old man, who has preserved his land, is to have two of his water licences removed. Anybody on the land knows full well that waterless country becomes valueless. Nobody wants it because nobody can use it.

The reason these water leases are being taken off him is to preserve the country. The country to be preserved is land that he has never touched. He has not cleared it; he has not done anything to it. On his behalf—and I have written to the Premier about this—I would ask the minister and the Premier to get together to allow this 94-year-old man to live out his days on his property with his water leases. It is not like they are going to have to wait a long time. They could be more generous to let an old man—who has served this country well in the past and who has not taken a penny from the government in any way, shape or form—to live out his days without this worry. If half of the members in this chamber had the courage that this gentleman has, then Queensland would be well on the way to being the—

**A government member:** The Smart State.

**Mrs PRATT:** The greatest state. I will not say the smartest, because we are not, but it could be the greatest state this country has.

From experience, the bodies that are consulted are some key stakeholders or some individuals, but they are a very select few. What guarantee can the minister give that a true and broad policy will be implemented with input from all key stakeholders, not just the ones that the government deems fit—that is, those who will support its policies? The government says that it has undertaken community

consultation, but many affected people I talk to have never been asked. The key bodies that supposedly represent them have never gone out and asked those people how they feel about certain legislation. It is deemed that they understand what the community wants, but that is not the case. There is not a single member in this House who can honestly say that they know exactly what the next person in their community who is subject to any form of legislation actually thinks without asking them. The truth is that what works on paper often does not work in practice. When it comes to environmental issues, one proposal just does not fit all. It is commendable that we do the utmost to protect the environment, but we must be wary that there are individuals involved, and individual concerns must be taken into consideration.

I am concerned about the third-party involvement. People view things in many different ways. To use the greenies as an example, I have been in many a stoush with the greenies over time. Many of them do not realise or do not accept the fact that, because man has grown his wheat pastures and everything else, the kangaroo and bird populations are in fact the highest they have ever been in history. We cannot stop animals multiplying. The more we grow crops, the more they will multiply. As in the case of sheep, during the good season there are many multiple births. There are more multiple animal births if the seasons are good and food is plentiful. If there is a drought, the roos will not multiply. They hold their joeys back until the season is good again. We know that if we keep growing food they will keep multiplying, so there have to be some controls.

I do not know how many members have been out west, but when the wheat crops are big they are harvested and covered with huge pads made up of layers of plastic because of the cockatoos and galahs, which can devastate a crop in no time at all. They will pick through the covers protecting the wheat. That lets the rain in which in turn destroys the crop. So there has to be some sort of controls. I am not saying that we should kill every living thing, because that would be downright ridiculous. I am a carer. I take in kangaroos and raise them and let them go. I take in owls and anything that needs assistance. So I know the value of them and appreciate them, but I also know the damage that they can cause and the reality of the situation. I have even had Internet brawls with Cherie Blair over kangaroos. Her input to the many conversations we have had and her knowledge of the animals of Australia comes from her friend based in the middle of Sydney who sends her brochures about the cute little faces of the animals. They are cute. We all are touched by their gorgeous faces, but we must never forget the reality of the situation: in plague proportions, animals can do a lot of damage.

In the past many of these so-called key industry and community representatives have had vested interests in water resource management and land clearing. The explanatory notes state that the policy objective is to achieve better environmental outcomes, and no-one would argue with that. What we can argue with is the way it is done. I know I want a better country for my children, and water is the prime commodity that we have to preserve. We all know that. There is not a single person in this room who does not know that. Because of the lessening rainfall and the climatic conditions, people in my electorate are putting in more water tanks simply because we know that, firstly, water is not going to be plentiful in due course and, secondly, the price is going to go through the roof. But every megalitre that a town does not use is one megalitre that can remain within the environment, and that has to be a really good thing.

For many rural land-holders, the Environmental Protection Act is already a burden. It imposes on them an unmanageable onus to not only comply with it but also to incur great expense. The development of contaminated land is also a huge issue and one that needs to be addressed. Many of these issues appear not to be understood by departmental officers in rural areas when formulating policy. Maybe that is why they do not seek really broad input and consultation. Perhaps that is intentional. I would hate to think it was. I hope it is out of ignorance that they just do not understand and therefore they do not canvass opinions widely enough. Unfortunately, I believe there is some intention not to get the full story.

I am still concerned about grazing permits. As has happened in the past, a lot of those are not being reviewed. Having been brought up in the country and having seen the effects of the revocation of grazing permits, I know that the change in the country is amazing. The rubbish that builds up once grazing permits have been terminated is horrendous. That happens in a very short time, because our native trees shed pretty quickly every year. Within two years I have seen in forests and bush the discarded bark over head height. I know I am not very tall, but it is still over my head. Weeds grow over it and smother any undergrowth, which dies back. It gets worse and worse. To me, that is environmental vandalism. That is the sort of vandalism that I believe this government has in the past perpetuated.

This also comes back to the question: will the government also comply with this system of environmental compliance to keep these lands under control? Farmers abutting government land continue to tell me all about the weeds and so on that come across their fence lines. They also talk about the animal pests. The level of damage is amazing. Some people look at their boundary fences and worry about the fire conditions; those who should be maintaining firebreaks do not do so. They

might believe that it is not the right time, that the general conditions are too dangerous. We can understand that. But it should be done earlier. I lived next to a forest in New South Wales for a long, long time. The burn-offs were always done in the winter, when there was heavy moisture in the air. It was always a controlled burn. Unfortunately, we often hear that controlled burns nowadays are causing major damage.

**Mr HOPPER:** I rise to a point of order. Madam Deputy Speaker, I draw your attention to the state of the chamber.

Quorum formed.

**Mrs PRATT:** There is not a single person in this House or in the outside world who does not want to see a better world, does not want to see the environment protected and does not want to crack down on anyone who wants to damage that environment. But the truth is that everybody who brings forth this legislation must understand that there are people involved. They must know something about it. It cannot be understood just by driving through the countryside. If they do not, they should go out there and sit around with a cup of tea. There is not a single person who would not be willing to tell the minister exactly what it is like out there.

A third person in the middle of Sydney, Canberra or Brisbane in some high-rise sprouting a view they know absolutely nothing about irritates people on the land more than anything else. If people want to learn, the rural sector is quite happy to teach them, educate them and accommodate them when they themselves have been treated as intelligent individuals and approached as such, not just dictated to: 'You're going to do this', 'We're going to take this off you', 'You must never do that or you will pay the price for it.' That is not fair. This must be addressed in a realistic and very communicative and conciliatory way.

This legislation is aimed at helping the industry and individuals and I have to support it, provided that the average person affected has participation in establishing the codes, not just the bureaucrats. The explanatory notes state that the development of a peripheral decision is removed from activities that are subject to a code, and conditions associated with the code cannot be varied. Again, we have been told that to ensure that operators' rights and interests are represented the development of standard environmental conditions and the associated code will involve a significant stakeholder engagement program. Please let that be true. But I ask: at what cost to the land-holder? What price will they be asked to pay? When the government does all these things and reduces their land to being worthless because they have no water or because it is impossible to grow a crop, will the government then give them just compensation? I doubt that would be the case.

If the stakeholders themselves are involved in this and if they are accepting of it, I, too, am quite happy to support this legislation. However, at this point it has not been proven that that is the case and, therefore, I do support it, but I do also have reservations about the entire legislation.