



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES

Hansard 26 November 2003

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL
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Mr FENLON (Greenslopes—ALP) (5.30 p.m.): I rise to speak in support of the Environmental Protection Legislation Amendment Bill 2003 and the Environmental Legislation Amendment Bill 2003. In doing so, I would like to very briefly outline what is in those bills before speaking about some general principles that I believe underlie these pieces of legislation and the responsible attitude to policy in conserving our environment in Queensland in general.

The Environmental Legislation Amendment Bill 2003 amends the Nature Conservation Act 1992 to extend the standing provisions to clarify the scope and application of provisions to improve the effectiveness of that act in conserving nature. It also ensures that the Nature Conservation Act and the Recreation Areas Management Act contain adequate powers to provide for the safety of children in respect of dangerous animals—a very important issue for all Queenslanders in this diverse and sometimes dangerous state. Thirdly, it amends the National Environment Protection Council (Queensland) Act 1994 to simplify statutory procedures and to make minor amendments in accordance with the national agreement.

The other piece of legislation, the Environmental Protection Legislation Amendment Bill, sets out to achieve better environmental outcomes and provide better service to the administering authorities' customers by improving the integration of the Environmental Protection Act 1994 and the Integrated Planning Act for all environmentally relevant activities other than mining or petroleum activities. The amendments also refine the assessment arrangements associated with development proposals that involve the management of contaminated land.

Whilst these pieces of legislation are largely machinery in nature, what underlies them are some fundamental principles in terms of forging greater cooperation between the various parties who have an interest in conservation in Queensland and to foster and perhaps formalise partnerships in that respect. In general, the players with an interest in conservation in this state are the public, and in Queensland the public is extremely—and increasingly so—environmentally conscious and interested. That manifests itself in neighbourhood groups through to general interest in learning about the environment and participating in our national parks, et cetera. The other player is the government, with the fundamental and constitutional responsibility to provide environmental protection for this great environment that we have inherited—our coastline, our seas and our land.

The third party that I would identify is the specific environmental groups. For example, N4C, a group in my electorate, has a great interest in re-establishing our waterways, our creeks and associated riparian environments. These people have enormous energy, perform a great deal of work and are part of the overall fabric of interests in maintaining, conserving and improving our environment.

The other major party, in my belief, having an interest in conservation is Queensland businesses. Whether it be small business or large business, business has an increasing stake and interest in the environment. That manifests at a number of levels, whether it be industries which may have noxious elements to them, such as mining, through to businesses that are reliant, such as ecotourism, on a good environment and the protection of that environment for the fundamental existence of their own business.

What we see underpinning this legislation, and the continuing evolution of in Queensland, is the development of greater partnerships between each of these parties. More and more we see each of

these parties working together to create better outcomes. In my own electorate, for example, with our local creek groups we have seen the Department of Natural Resources fund significant works which are adjacent to the Greenslopes Private Hospital. If anyone wishes to have a look at the work being done there, they will see that it is magnificent. You simply go down Nicholson Street and you will see the work that has been undertaken in association with local city council funding, federal government funding as well, as I understand it, as funding from the Department of Natural Resources to clear weeds, to re-establish the waterway and to bring what was a fairly devastated and neglected area back to a very enjoyable state in the sense that local residents can walk through those areas and enjoy a real sense of nature with native trees and the prospect of seeing animals in the waterway itself.

There is a lot of innovation being applied there. One of the leading exponents within our local groups, Damien Madden, has come up with a great new idea to ensure that weeds are not allowed to grow back because of the removal of large trees that might not be wanted any more. What he has proposed is that we plant native fig trees at the top of radiata pine trees that are no longer wanted so that ultimately the fig tree will kill the host tree, thus creating a new canopy to ensure that weed growth does not return. Ultimately, the host tree is killed deliberately or by being smothered by the fig, thus creating a forest of more natural native vegetation—vegetation that will, like the fig tree, attract our native birds and animals. These are great initiatives that are coming through from our local community and from the public in general. With the support of various levels of government, they are able to achieve great results right down to our local suburbs and, indeed, in the metropolitan area.

This need for a greater partnership is also manifested on a more macro scale when we look at the level of development, particularly in the south-east corner, and the amount of land that has been set aside for conservation purposes. We must compliment Brisbane City Council for the magnificent work that it has done in the past decade—in particular, in implementing a green levy. I am told by my council colleagues that the amount of land that is now conserved within the Brisbane metropolitan area compares extremely favourably to that conserved within other state capitals and on a world basis. That is a magnificent achievement. Once we get outside the Brisbane metropolitan area it is not hard to see that much of the land that we see as bushland is privately owned. The potential for development on that land is extreme, and we really have to keep an eye on our strategic approach to planning and development in south-east Queensland, in particular, to ensure that much of that land is conserved in strategic corridors.

The only way we are going to achieve that is by working closely with business to ensure that balance is achieved when development occurs. We need to make sure that, as far as possible, we find ways of ensuring that the interests of business and the conservation of important tracts of land are congruent. We are still in the very early stages of exploring ways and means of achieving that by various incentives, or by looking at forms of development that provide greater flexibility in a way that allows conservation of land. That might be by exchanging land that might be more attractive to business with other land or other forms of cooperation.

I am sure that there are many ways to develop these partnerships. What is important is that we provide, by legislation such as this and future legislation, an adequate framework to allow that cooperation to occur, and to encourage such cooperation. These are important pieces of legislation that take us along that continuum. I commend these bills to the House.