



Speech by

Dr Bruce Flegg

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

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NATURE CONSERVATION AMENDMENT BILL

Dr FLEGG (Moggill—Lib) (4.34 p.m.): I rise to speak in the debate on the Nature Conservation Amendment Bill 2004. I would like to say at the outset that the Liberal Party will be supporting the bill and its commitment to environmental issues that affect all Queenslanders. There has been a lot of congratulations for the minister, so I hope he is not getting a swelled head. We know that he has been pretty busy with the midnight meetings and we know that all the time spent running the Liberal Party would take its toll! One has got to have a pretty close look at the bill and make sure that, in his overworked state, he has managed to get it right. There are a couple of minor things that we will be drawing attention to in the bill, but the general thrust of it we are happy to support.

The Nature Conservation Act 1992 classifies wildlife under five categories—presumed extinct, endangered, vulnerable, rare or common. As the minister explained in his second reading speech, the Nature Conservation Amendment Bill 2004 will include five of the nine International Union for the Conservation of Nature categories. These are: 'extinct in the wild', 'endangered', 'vulnerable', 'near threatened' and 'least concern'. I gave them the chance but they did not take it.

A government member interjected.

Dr FLEGG: Too late! They cannot come in that late. The protection of our environment, our natural resources and wildlife is of the utmost importance for today and future generations.

Mr Lawlor interjected.

Dr FLEGG: Too late; the member missed it. I have consulted with a number of environmental groups in my area and a number of the state groups. There are a few things that have not been taken into consideration. One is the consideration of including a category for 'critically endangered'.

Mr Mickel interjected.

Dr FLEGG: I told the member he is too late. The Queensland Conservation Council has explained that there is a need for a sixth category which I have referred to as 'critically endangered', which would be positioned between the 'extinct in the wild' and 'endangered' categories to cater for wildlife that is on the verge of extinction.

An example of this is the northern hairy-nosed wombat where numbers of the species are down to around 100. They do not fit into the 'extinct in the wild' or the 'endangered' category. The northern hairy-nosed wombat is likely to be extinct if the threat to the species continues.

Mrs Carryn Sullivan interjected.

Dr FLEGG: That is why we need the 'critically endangered' category. The inclusion of the 'critically endangered' category would have brought this situation to the forefront to reinforce the environmental needs of some of these species. There is a distinct gap between these two categories that should have been considered by the government.

Another example of a critically endangered species is the yellow chat bird situated in the Rockhampton area where numbers are down to around 50, which is of grave concern to the Queensland

Conservation Council in its dedication to the preservation of wildlife and the natural environment of Queensland. The loss of habitat, encroachment of development and environmental change could continue to threaten these species. The federal government agrees that there is a need to have a 'critically endangered' category.

A government member interjected.

Dr FLEGG: I was going to let them off, but I will read this. The state government's inconsistencies in regard to these classifications of categories are evident. The Minister for the Environment assured us in his second reading speech that no species will change conservation status directly because of the bill. Whilst he was running and advising the Liberal Party, maybe the minister should have realised that he missed a whole category of wildlife. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature mission statement is to influence, encourage and assist societies throughout the world to preserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable.

Would it have been more appropriate to take a lead more closely from the International Union for the Conservation of Nature as one of the world's leading organisations for the environment and guidance on conservation, knowledge, policy and advice? The IUCN system of classification for the conservation status of wildlife is one of the most widely accepted in the world. I would suggest that the minister address this issue and make comment on it in his summing up if he wishes. If there is an inconsistency with the omission of a critically endangered category, one must ask whether the new change in terminology from 'common' to 'least concern' and 'presumed extinct' to 'extinct in the wild' is appropriate. I noted the minister's comments in his second reading speech about dropping the expression 'common' because he felt that he would be under pressure to recategorise some parts of wildlife. This seemed a bit inconsistent, because there are some species that will even increase in number because of the activities of man. I did not think that dropping 'common' was appropriate, because the reality is that some species are not particularly impacted by what is happening.

Environmentally sustainable habitat for Australian wildlife is one of the keys to ensuring that endangered species can move from the endangered category to the 'near threatened' or even 'of least concern' categories. I am a strong advocate of preserving the natural environment and sustainable ecologically sound communities where the flora and fauna habitat can be maintained without too much interruption from development. In my electorate of Moggill—we have got to Moggill now, and I still have 14 minutes to do Moggill—residents have moved into the area because they are looking for a semirural environment to live in where there is a unique balance between the environment and communities. The local environmental groups lobby to ensure that this preservation of native habitat is fulfilled. I want to acknowledge the hard work of these groups in my area—the Moggill Creek Catchment Group, the Moggill Koala Hospital, REPA, the Hut Environmental and Community Association, the Pullen Pullen Catchment Group, the Cubberla Creek Group and the Wilderness Society.

The recent announcement by the federal government should be applauded with regard to the increase in federal funding for the environment—a rise to record levels for the 2004-05 year. This commitment to environmental issues by the federal government has shown the way for the preservation of our world renowned environment. Federal Minister for Environment and Heritage, David Kemp, in a recent media release stated that—

... a whole-of-government approach to sustainability is essential—that's why we've nominated a sustainable environment as one of our key strategic priorities, and made an environmentally sustainable Australia one of our four national research priorities.

One of the most significant initiatives to come out of the federal commitment to the environment is the continuation of the Envirofund, which is the key local component of the Natural Heritage Trust—the largest environmental rescue effort delivered by any Australian government. Senator Ian Macdonald, the federal Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation, explained—

Community groups can apply for grants from a few hundred dollars up to \$30,000 to carry out on-ground actions to target local problems such as water quality, destruction of native vegetation, salinity and coastal erosion.

This program will ensure the ecological sustainability of ecosystems for the environment and Australian wildlife.

In conclusion, I want to reiterate the commitment of the parliamentary Liberal Party to the environment and sustainable environmental management practices across Queensland. I know that the minister takes his responsibilities to the environment very seriously, and it is only with these small reservations that I am happy to say the Liberals will be supporting the bill.