



Speech by

**Shane Knuth**

**MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS**

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## **NATURAL RESOURCES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr KNUTH** (Charters Towers—NPA) (5.15 p.m.): This bill provides an amnesty period for people to surrender illegally held pests in order to discourage them from dumping them on the natural environment—for example, the red-eared slider turtle, which is a major pest animal in Brisbane and which can cause great harm to the environment. It amazes me that this government says that it is concerned about the environment when it is spending million of dollars buying up national parks, yet all that has resulted is a breeding ground for feral animals and noxious weeds. I believe that this government needs to clean up its own act before it asks people to clean up their back yards.

I would like to draw the attention of members to a serious pest that has unsettled the people of Charters Towers. It is a more serious threat than the red-eared slider turtle—so serious that the government's public health unit has issued a warning for people to keep away from these pests. In the past four years, Charters Towers residents have been plagued by flying foxes inhabiting residential areas. Every Queenslanders has a basic right to a safe and healthy living environment.

**Ms Nolan** interjected.

**Mr Seeney:** You go and live with them and see how long you last.

**Mr KNUTH:** If you had 3,000 bats at your house, you would like them removed, wouldn't you?

**Mr Seeney:** Absolutely.

**Mr KNUTH:** You would like to have 3,000 bats removed from your home.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Fraser): Order! Members will come to order. I remind the member for Charters Towers to address his remarks through the chair.

**Mr KNUTH:** It is a very simple process. Every Queenslanders has the basic right to a safe and healthy living environment. Usually, when this quality of living is disturbed, health departments, environmentalists and compassionate governments would be moving to help. But the residents of Charters Towers are being denied this right.

The residents of Charters Towers have had to put up with flying foxes ranging in numbers from 100 to 5,000 in their back yards. I am not talking about bats; I am talking about people. These people cannot sleep because of the noise; they cannot peg their clothes on the line without being covered with bat excrement. When they turn on their airconditioners in 40 degrees heat, the stench enters their homes. In some cases, this stench has made many people physically ill. I ask members to just remember that I am talking about people, not bats.

This problem has affected the majority of my community at one time or another. Adults, children of all ages from babies to high school students, and the elderly and infirm have suffered from a lack of sleep, high levels of stress, and a substantial decrease in the quality of their lives. A health warning has already been issued telling the general public not to attempt to touch these animals or pick the dead or injured flying foxes off the ground in fear that they may contact lyssavirus.

This matter is a state government issue. Under the federal government's biodiversity act, the black and red flying foxes are a non-threatened species. I ask the government, the Premier and the ministers to stop pandering to the Greens and look after the people at the grassroots. As evidenced by the electoral backlash that the federal Labor Leader, Mark Latham, copped following his support of the Greens in Tasmania, the federal election proved that when the Labor Party backs the Greens they lose votes.

These bats have been flapping around for four years. They have been living on top of people's homes. As I said, the public health unit has issued a warning for people to keep away from these bats. But the government is too afraid to get rid of them in case of a green group backlash. The government has plans to do something about the red-eared slider turtle. What are its plans to get rid of this scourge from Charters Towers?

This is a very simple process. The problem is that there are restrictions on permits. We cannot remove those flying foxes after 7 o'clock in the morning. What on earth is the point of scaring the bats away at 5 o'clock in the afternoon? They are ready to flap away to feed anyway. The time restriction should be removed so that we can harass the bats and get them out of town. Then the problem will be solved. We have wasted hundreds of thousands of dollars when this problem could have been solved three or four years ago. It is a simple process. It is also not about killing animals.

**Mrs Carryn Sullivan:** You want to kill them all.

**Mr KNUTH:** We would like to kill a hell of a lot of them.

**Government members** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Fraser): Order! I remind all members that we are not going to conduct a quarrel or a debate across the chamber.

**Mr KNUTH:** I am more concerned about the people of Charters Towers. I am more concerned about mothers, health and people. As I said, hundreds of thousands of dollars has been spent, wasting time chasing bats around the town, when the problem could be solved if the government removed the restrictions on the permit. All we need is a decent permit so that we can harass the bats out of town.

I take this opportunity to talk about another pest that is becoming a particular major concern for a large number of Queenslanders. Most of my state colleagues have raised this issue before. Feral dog attacks on sheep and cattle are estimated to cost producers \$18.3 million in direct livestock losses. The cost of controlling feral dogs through baiting, fencing and trapping is estimated at \$5.4 million. These pests are causing considerable damage, and people have been reporting the loss of calves, sheep, kangaroos, ducks and other farm animals. They also consume native wildlife. People are becoming increasingly frustrated with these wild dogs' arrogance as they are becoming more confident and roaming around the towns.

Just like the incident on Fraser Island, it will be only a matter of time before someone is injured. Earlier this year one landowner in my electorate was attacked by a small pack of wild dogs and was extremely lucky not to be seriously injured. Another person out pig shooting was stalked by a group of dingoes. In Charters Towers, a couple who bred miniature horses for 20 years had finally got their perfect miniature breeding horse, worth over \$20,000, but this was mauled by a pack of wild dogs and is no longer able to be used for breeding purposes. Last week two parents with young children had a pack of five wild dogs running around their home.

It is time the government took a commonsense approach similar to the attitude of the Blackall shire. This council offered a \$50 bounty and a \$1,000 reward to whoever picked up the most scalps. Fifty-eight scalps were brought in in less than four weeks. I am a supporter of blanket baiting, but I believe that it is very difficult to manage and some locals are concerned about the impact baiting will have on domestic and native species.

The wild dog is more abundant than ever and, as such, is becoming more and more of a nuisance. I raised this issue earlier in the year in parliament. I believe that a government-funded dingo bounty of \$60 or \$70 a scalp would provide the incentive needed for roo shooters and recreational hunters to shoot the dingoes which would in turn reduce the potential risk of attacks on people as well as save millions to the Queensland economy. I support this bill but not the amendment.