



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

Hansard Thursday, 11 November 2004

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (4.20 p.m.): I rise to speak in the debate on the Environmental Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. The Environmental Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2004 makes critical amendments to several pieces of environmental legislation in Queensland. This continues this government's commitment to effective environmental legislation. It is designed to protect Queensland's environment and enhance our nature conservation measures while improving our administrative efficiency by enhancing the regulation of coastal developments, streamlining the South-East Queensland Forest Agreement and Wet Tropics forest tenure transfer to protect areas of tenure and implementing legislative amendments recommended by a major wildlife management review carried out last year.

This review fulfils a commitment by the government to streamline wildlife management, reduce red tape and simplify the National Conservation Regulation 1994 and the Nature Conservation (Wildlife) Regulation 1994. The review recommended amendments to the Nature Conservation Act 1992 and the Nature Conservation Regulation 1994.

I want to raise an issue that I have brought to the attention of the House a number of times. I am hoping this review may result in amendments to the Nature Conservation Act 1992. I am seeking the issuing of the appropriate permits to remove flying foxes from Charters Towers and other areas of Queensland. The flying foxes are still there. They have been flapping around for four years. The community is asking the government to issue the appropriate permit to remove the flying foxes. Later on I will describe for members very simply the appropriate permit. It would be so simple. It has been four years and they are still there.

A government member interjected.

Mr KNUTH: That is why I am here. I am taking this issue to the parliament and putting my view to the parliament so that hopefully the government will address this problem. In the last four years Charters Towers residents have been putting up with plagues of flying foxes inhabiting residential areas. Right now there are 1,000 bats roosting above a number of people's homes. Would those opposite like a thousand bats above their homes? They would want their government to remove those bats. They have been there for the last 18 months.

Mr Lawlor interjected.

Mr KNUTH: You would like someone to remove them for you, wouldn't you?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Shine): Order! The honourable member will address his remarks through the chair.

Mr KNUTH: Every Queenslanders has the basic right to a safe and healthy environment. Normally when this quality of life is disturbed, health departments, environmentalists and compassionate

governments would move in to help. The residents of Charters Towers have been totally and absolutely denied this right.

The residents of Charters Towers have been putting up with flying foxes in their backyards ranging in numbers from 100 to 5,000. These people cannot sleep because of the noise and they cannot peg out their clean clothes on the line without them being covered with bat excreta. They turn on their airconditioners in the 40 degree heat and the stench enters their homes. In some cases it has made people physically ill. This problem has affected the majority of the community at one time. Adults, children of all ages, babies, high school students, the elderly and the infirm have suffered from a lack of sleep, high levels of stress and a substantial decrease in their quality of life.

Health warnings have already been issued telling the general public not to attempt to touch these animals or to pick up the dead or injured flying foxes off the ground for fear they may contract lyssavirus. The other day a child at Bushland Beach north of Townsville was injured by a flying fox. Flying foxes were captured at the scene and tested positive for lyssavirus. The child had to undergo medical treatment, which included several painful injections in the face.

A significant number of baby bats have been swooping at people. This problem has continued for the last four years. If a crocodile takes up residence in a populated area it would be removed. Two years ago a crocodile was found in a river near the Burdekin. It was causing problems so it was removed. If it is good enough to remove the crocs, it is good enough to remove the bats. This is a state government issue as the black and red flying foxes are a non-threatened species under the federal government's Biodiversity Act.

I have a media release dated 7 December 2001 which states that the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service has issued Charters Towers City Council with permits to shift some of the flying foxes roosting in parts of Lissner Park. The permits would allow the council to remove little red flying foxes from residential areas. The permits are useless. Why are they useless? We cannot touch, remove or harass those bats after 7 o'clock in the morning. That is the reason the bats are still there. We are asking for a decent permit so that we can harass those bats after 7 o'clock in the morning so that we can get them out of town. If we cannot harass the bats after 7 o'clock in the morning—

Ms Boyle: You have got to have the place to take them.

Mr KNUTH: Okay, that is what the people of Charters Towers want to know. We have been hearing about a bat habitat for many years. This has been going on for three years. They want to know what is going on and when it is going to happen.

Ms Boyle: I understand that it is up to the council to supply the plot of land that everybody has agreed is the best. It is waiting for council approval.

Mr KNUTH: If it is waiting for council approval, is the government doing anything to issue that land approval?

Ms Boyle: I will double-check it.

Mr KNUTH: That is what we want to find out. We want to get the ball rolling. We want to see these bats removed. I do not want bring up this issue again. We want them removed. I commend the bill to the House.