



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

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ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (2.35 pm): I am pleased to rise to speak in the debate on the Environmental Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. In doing so I endorse the shadow environment minister's comments on this legislation. Briefly dealing with the first three parts of the bill, I commend the minister on bringing forward the amendments to the Integrated Planning Act 1997, the Coastal Protection and Management Act 1995 and the Environmental Protection Act 1994. These are all good and necessary amendments to these acts.

The point of contention, I suppose, is the amendments to the Nature Conservation Act 1992 and the way they affect horse riders throughout the state. At present, recreational horse riding can occur in certain areas of state forests around the state. Indeed, there are many Queenslanders who enjoy and use these existing trails on a weekend or at their own leisure. At present this kind of horse riding can occur under regulatory notice. This horse riding occurs in conservation parks, resources reserves and national park recovery areas. Recreational horse riding is prohibited in national parks with a handful of exceptions.

This legislation will by 2013 make some of the national park recovery areas into national parks and, as such, those areas currently available for recreational horse riding will become national parks and recreational horse riding will be prohibited. Herein lies the issue: how is there a balance between safe and enjoyable horse riding trails and the preserved need to protect the environment. In a press release issued on 1 December last year, the ironically named Barry Traill from the Wilderness Society said—

The primary purpose of national parks is for the conservation of nature. It is simply not appropriate to have horse riding in our most sensitive areas of bushland. Our bushland has not evolved to cope with large hard hooved (sic) animals such as horses.

He went on to say—

Horse riders need to recognise that the environment movement is not opposed to them. We are simply opposed to horse riding in national parks and keen to see riders secure alternative trails outside the national park estate as soon as possible.

The problem is that the horse riding public does feel as though environmental groups are opposed to them. This time they have enlisted the government as their body to protect them. The government has announced—and I do recognise this fact—a 236 kilometre horse trail in the Noosa-Tewantin region as well as a 208 kilometre trail in the Gold Coast hinterland stretching to Beaudesert. This seems particularly wonderful as it connects the pony clubs around the western Gold Coast, including Cedar Lakes and Tamborine.

However, the problem is that these new trails outside of national parks are seen by some as death traps. Many of the horse riding associations and others in public life who have horse riding experience have labelled the horse trails as dangerous, death traps and incomprehensible—so much so that some horse riders have gone to great lengths, including trying to have trails heritage listed, to save the trails that are currently being used.

I hope that the minister realises that one cannot just blaze away a trail and then once all is said and done classify it as challenging or recreational for the purpose of a press release. There have been stiff

objections to the safety level of these trails. I can tell members that this is coming from people who enjoy trails week in and week out. I also find it tough to fathom that we are looking at areas that are going from national park recovery areas to national parks. All in all it is a classification change, yet all of a sudden the hard hoofs are causing erosion and the spread of infectious weeds and becomes so much of a problem that the land can no longer be ridden on. It seems almost illogical that a piece of land suddenly changes like that. It is a fair indication that this bill is over-restrictive and that perhaps there is a slight element of politics to it all.

I also note the concerns of the member for Nicklin about recreational dog walkers who have been in these areas for years and years. I would hate to have the job of the wildlife official filming people yesterday feeding the dolphins at Tin Can Bay. There was a photo in yesterday's *Courier-Mail*. We would hate to be the poor wildlife official who had to say to his wife, 'I have got to go out and film people today who are doing the wrong thing.' When they go to work these officials are going to have to penalise people for walking dogs or riding horses. Yet if people are not being penalised for doing these things wrongly, it leads to great frustration that laws are not being enforced. Laws that are not enforced are worse than no laws at all.

As a friend of mine said to me recently—he is a serving police officer—about the smoking laws, 'If you're asked by a health inspector for your name, tell them it's Mickey Mouse. What are they going to do? Arrest you?' The inspectors whom we saw in that case were out in force for a week or two and now there is no-one enforcing those smoking laws, and that leads to great frustration. I also remember reading about a journalist who came out for an Ashes cricket tour some years ago and said that the country had changed so much from the country that he knew when it was frontier country because we have laws telling people to do the most obvious things yet there is no-one to enforce them. With those few comments, I commend the bill to the House.