



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

Hansard Thursday, 6 October 2005

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (12.45 pm): One of the key objectives of this legislation is to provide a certification process for progressive rehabilitation that has been completed for parts of a mining project. This will provide a standardised rehabilitation process, give more assurances to mining companies and provide greater incentives to rehabilitate along the way.

My one concern is for residents living close to a mining lease. It was great to see the restricted area placed around the greater Springfield area, and it shows that the government, while recognising the importance of mining expansion, also recognises the need for residential development and the need to respect the quality of life of residents. I commend the minister on granting this restricted area. I hope the same courtesy will be extended to the residents of Moranbah. No community wants a mine at their doorstep. Rehabilitation of a mine site is relatively easy compared to the rehabilitation of families whose health has been impaired by the distance between their homes and an open-cut mine or to the rehabilitation of a community which no longer has families living in the town because of the closeness of an open-cut mine.

No rehabilitation process is going to completely give back what has been lost. A line needs to be drawn between protection and expansion. What is vitally important is that residents of these areas are not disadvantaged by expansion. Rehabilitation is important because the goal is to return the environment to close to what it was. The community of Moranbah will become a ghost town if no consideration is given to the rights of residents, regardless of how much is spent on rehabilitation or the standardisation of the rehabilitation process. I urge the minister to keep this in mind when decisions about the future of the Moranbah community are made.

I note the comments of the member for Keppel that the Beattie government cares for all Queenslanders. I believe he was sincere when he made those remarks, but I would like to invite the member to Charters Towers, because what has been going on there in the last five years is a disgrace. We have had flying foxes living amongst residents for five years. It has come to the point where we have had enough. The town is stressing out and continues to stress out.

These bats are a non-threatened species under the federal government's biodiversity act. They are also in plague proportions. They carry a lyssavirus, a Hendra virus, other lethal viruses and parasites. One lady who brought her new baby home had a thousand bats above her home. She has lived with that situation for almost five years now. I went and visited that home and I could see all the parasites from those flying foxes pouring over her home. People cannot operate their airconditioners because of the stench. It is a disturbance of the peace. The sick, the frail and the elderly are breaking out in rashes not just because of the flying foxes but also because of the stress.

The biggest issue here is the permits. The problem is that we cannot harass the bats after 7 o'clock in the morning. I have spoken to the minister about this. We can harass the bats at 5 o'clock in the afternoon when they are about to fly away. That is a time when everybody is home from work and the children are home. Everyone is about to have tea, and we have to listen to the booms and bangs of

frightened birds. This is when we are all settled and ready to have tea and should be enjoying quality time at home. We cannot harass the bats after 7 o'clock in the morning because of fears that the bats will become stressed. We can harass them at 5 o'clock in the morning, but that is when everybody is asleep in bed.

An honourable member: That's the time when they're trying to land; that's the best time.

Mr KNUTH: That is the time when they are trying to land, that is right; that is a point. But if the bats are harassed at 5 o'clock in the morning, while everybody is asleep in bed, the residents are the ones who become stressed. The bats cannot be harassed after 7 o'clock in the morning because of the fear that they will become stressed.

This issue could have been solved years ago. We have spent over a quarter of a million dollars chasing bats from one tree to the other. The council workers get up at 5 o'clock in the morning to make a noise to chase these bats from one tree to another. We need to harass the bats in the middle of the day when they are asleep and when everybody is at work, not at 5 o'clock in the morning. It would be a simple process to harass the bats in the middle of day. Any stress to the community could be avoided if we could harass the bats when they are sleeping, not when we are sleeping.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Wallace): Order! Member for Charters Towers, I have allowed some fairly wide-ranging discussion on this matter, but I would ask you to return to the bill before the House.

Mr KNUTH: Okay, Mr Deputy Speaker. We have one of the biggest river systems in north Queensland. The bat problem could be solved with a simple process. We have a petition going. The town wants the bats culled. Another simple solution is to put the quality of life of the people of Charters Towers first and allow us to harass those bats in the middle of day rather than at 5 o'clock in the morning, when everybody is asleep in bed. If we do that, I will never again have to raise this issue in parliament.