



Speech by

## Robert Messenger

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Hansard Wednesday, 1 November 2006

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### NATURE CONSERVATION AMENDMENT BILL

**Mr MESSENGER** (Burnett—NPA) (9.01 pm): I continue my short contribution to the Nature Conservation Amendment Bill. I would like to remind the House that the people who are imposing this legislation on Queenslanders are imposing not only legislation but also an ideology. They are also imposing their religion by stealth on regional and rural communities. It is an extreme green religion that elevates the status of animals to that of humans, giving them human attributes and human feelings. It is a pantheistic religion which has Gaea as God and Gorbachev as one of the high priests. I remind these people of another religion and a god. It is the God to which the Premier is going to pray for rain tomorrow for the TV cameras. There is a book that belongs to this God. In it he says—

Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky ...

Dr Hugh Lavery was the founding director of research and planning in the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service. Prior to that he studied waterfowl, mostly in tropical Queensland but also at the renowned Wild Fowl Trust in the UK, for the Illinois Natural History Survey in the US and at the Delta research station in Canada. He has published many scientific papers that subsequently were popularised in *Wild Ducks and Other Waterfowl in Queensland* and formed part of Harry Firth's multi-edition *Waterfowl in Australia*. He is a well-known expert on waterfowl, ducks and quail in Queensland. In fact, I have in my hand a book written by Hugh Lavery. I have spoken with Hugh many times. I have been lucky enough to meet him. He is a gentleman. I first met with him when he conducted the 15th Romeo W. Lahey memorial lecture at the National Parks Association on Wednesday, 19 October.

Hugh writes in a magazine called *Fur and Feather*. He talks about duck shooting. Hugh writes about whether a custom reaching back to Aboriginal times should continue, whether harvesting these birds can still be sustainable and whether accountability to meet modern social concerns is feasible, and it deserves critical attention. Hugh then goes on throughout the article, which is quite an informative one, to say—

It's quite widely accepted that waterfowl, like larger kangaroos, had benefited from the proliferation of man-made shallow wetlands and grazing uplands in Queensland. The spread of hunting across Queensland can be seen through the recovery places of duck bans. The form of harvesting is as varied as the game bird species and their seasonal habitat. On average, the species taken is the Pacific black duck, supplemented by the grey teal, main duck, wandering whistler duck and hard head. Most are taken either by landholders and their friends inland or groups of duck shooters, sometimes in organised clubs, on coastal wetlands that may have been built and managed by them.

The number taken by any one hunter is usually remarkably small, the large bag is skewed heavily towards the limited numbers of skilled shooters. Between 15 per cent and 20 per cent of targeted birds are injured and escape detection, depending on habitat type and whether retriever dogs are used. These are usually quickly taken by predators such as peregrine falcons. No evidence of effect of lead shot in birds that escape alive has yet been found in Queensland. Maximum annual takes during occasionally wet years across Queensland has been calculated to be in the vicinity of 100,000 and 150,000—

Hugh writes—

a small proportion of an overall population estimated in millions at their peaks.

He says—

The majority of birds harvested are juveniles, Pacific black duck and grey teal especially. These are departing their ephemeral inland breeding grounds in what can often be a futile search for permanent coastal wetlands which are already overinhabited by local populations. The huge advantage lies with the localised pairs of ducks that secrete themselves very effectively close to their breeding

grounds and respond by nesting quickly and repeatedly to the onset of rain. Huge populations are then derived from relatively small numbers. The breeding stock is rarely seen by hunters.

Under the heading 'Waterfowl management: a more conservative approach', he says—

Some matters central to the argument about duck shooting. Conservation legislation seeks to sustain the species, not preserve every individual. My debate is thus about sustainability. I do not enter into the subject of cruelty. This latter engages a different concept and is addressed in other styles of legislation.

I think he puts it succinctly there. He talks about sustainability of the species and he does not seek to preserve every individual, which is the whole point and thrust of the argument of why we have opposed this legislation. It is legislation that does not seek to sustain species.

**An honourable member interjected.**

**Mr MESSENGER:** I will take the interjection. It is a complete political stunt.

Another group has written to me about this issue of shooting ducks and quails—the Wide Bay Working Gundog Club—and it has also written to the former minister for the environment and member for Cairns. It writes—

Our club members are dumbfounded and totally stunned by your decision—

This is, of course, writing to the former environment minister—

to support the banning of the harvesting of duck and quail in open seasons in the future and the cancellation of the next duck and quail management plan. Our membership is made up of a varied range of folk from professionals to labourers, reflective of a typical community, who are questioning whether the Labor Party has unwittingly been hoodwinked by organisations with a clear vested interest. The Labor Party as far as anyone is aware does not have a national policy to ban the harvesting of renewable natural resources.

I am wondering if this legislation that is in the state arena is going to be also agreed upon by a federal Labor Party. The letter continues—

The arguments you have raised for the bans are that the pursuit and harvest of a renewable natural resource such as duck and quail is—

and the letter runs through a whole list of arguments—

inappropriate because participants lack the skill and expertise in game identification.

The letter goes on to counter that by saying—

It's a blatant lie aimed at public consumption and aimed at hoodwinking the government and the minister of the day—an argument being used by those who want to see bannings as a result of their own personal beliefs and supported by the government because of their own personal beliefs. You are a minister—

and it is obviously referring to the previous minister—

representing all Queenslanders, not just a chosen few. There is absolutely no data or evidence in Queensland to support this assertion. The licensing process itself was designed specifically to address that issue.

I will say that again. If a person is a licensed duck hunter, they have the skill and expertise in game identification. The group goes on to dispel a few myths at the back of this letter. It continues—

The view and submissions of the RSPCA and other animal welfare groups were overrepresented on the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee and this group had undue influence during the process undertaken by the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee's deliberations on preparing advice for the Minister for Primary Industries by using invalid and unsupported evidence. At the same time, Field and Game Australia, the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia and the Canine Control Council were not given the same opportunities of sitting on the committee as full members and the representations were brushed aside.

Current duck and quail harvest permit holders were not brought into the process of discussion, making it in any way transparent. The RSPCA tabled unsubstantiated, biased, misleading and incorrect data including the internationally discredited Russell wounding rate report model. Absolutely no evidence exists that only one in 10 birds shot is retrieved to hand. Virtually all hunters use highly-trained efficient retrieving breeds of specialist gundogs. Data relating to the harvest of quail has never been tabled because it does not exist and the only reliable source of information comes from quail hunters. Clearly this is a mischievous and misleading assertion. The highly credentialed Pope and Webb reports that examine closely the Australian scene in game management were not given the same airing.

As well as that, a conflict of interest exists in having Dr Anne Covill both as a representative of the RSPCA on the Duck and Quail Management Committee and as a key adviser on the AWAC. No other representatives on the Duck and Quail Advisory Committee were offered that opportunity to sit as full members. It is also important that the community be given answers to the following: was the timing of the release of the ministerial statement linked to the attempt of garnering support from the greens during the lead-up to the election?

I would have to say yes. The letter continues—

Is it more or less cruel in taking duck and quail for the table than the same process was during pest mitigation? Is it more or less cruel for recreational fishermen to harvest fish for the table using current methods? Is there a degree of hypocrisy at play when one can harvest a rabbit for the table using a shotgun and the practice is not to be considered cruel and barbaric and yet the exact opposite applies to duck and quail? Is the legitimate involvement of the Indigenous population in the harvesting of natural resources such as duck and quail being now viewed in a different light? Are the appropriate and just rights of the Indigenous populations to harvest duck and quail with common tools such as shotguns being extinguished? If not, would the taking of duck and quail by Indigenous communities be viewed as less cruel than if the same ducks and quail were being taken for the table by the average citizen of the states?

Is there not a clear conflict of interest in having Dr Anne Covill of the RSPCA as a key sitting member of both the Duck and Quail Advisory Committee and the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee? Is there not a clear expression of bias and the limiting of due process and natural justice by having the minister stating—

that is, the previous minister—

her clear objections to hunting in public forums, suggesting that the practice is barbaric and clearly discarding scientific analysis and evidence that supports this alternative view?

I want to thank the Wide Bay Working Gundog Club, including Mr John Palus, Ms Marilyn Walsh and Ms Bev Gilbert, because I have had the pleasure of seeing their dogs in action. These dogs are highly-trained animals. This is a very professional group who are made up of dedicated conservationists. I will repeat that point again: these people are dedicated conservationists who know what they are talking about. This legislation before the House is nothing more than a political stunt and I will be opposing it.